ABSTRACT

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HIS-STORY, HER-STORY: NAMES MAKING OUR-STORY IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S *LINDEN HILLS*, *MAMA DAY*, AND *BAILEY'S CAFÉ*

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This study examines the onomastic consistencies in three of Gloria Naylor's novels: Linden Hills (1985), Mama Day (1988), and Bailey's Café (1992). The naming patterns exhibited by Naylor in the triad demonstrate a similar practice used by other African American writers. This thesis explores her use of the motif as well as her expansion of it to include feminist and theological tenets in order to challenge hegemonic systems, especially patriarchy.

To explicate the use of names in the three texts discussed in the thesis, the original Afrofemtheological theory is utilized to embrace all three of Naylor's clear influences - Afrocentrism, Feminism, and Theology - in the naming traditions evident in her works. In using a combination of various naming strategies, the three novels indicate that the naming process and the formation of self-identity are communal processes that are multi-faceted in nature. By including community, spirituality, and cultural history in self-actualization efforts like naming, systems such as patriarchy can be fought and demolished.

# HIS-STORY, HER-STORY: NAMES MAKING OUR-STORY IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S LINDEN HILLS, MAMA DAY, AND BAILEY'S CAFÉ

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C O N T E N T S

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Each Gloria Naylor novel is a complexity of feminism, spirituality, and African American literary and cultural tradition. The author's first feminist statement in novel form, The Women of Brewster Place is the clarion of Naylor's impressive body of literature. In her second novel Linden Hills, Naylor wields an abrasive critique of the Black bourgeoisie and structures it around the framework of Dante's Inferno. Mama Day straddles the soil of the African American south and Western geological space to form a legacy-rich tale. Completing Naylor's quartet of novels is Bailey's Café, a matriarchal rewriting of the Holy Bible. The latest addition to the author's cadre of novels is The Men of Brewster Place, a collection of detailed life accounts of the men who were introduced in The Women of Brewster Place.

Salient among the last three novels of Naylor's quartet are the characters' names, each viscerally loaded. Treading a course steeped in familial and cultural history, the Naylor reader encounters names like Mama Day, Dr. Buzzard, and Miss Maple. Mama Day leads the eponymously named novel as it resonates both African and Western influence. In her own captivity, Willa Nedeed in Linden Hills discovers documents left by sister-wives that describe their own unique patriarchal prisons. Eve and her bordello brood in Bailey's Café tell their stories, hushed in traditional Judeo-Christian thought, to proclaim ***herstory*** instead of ***history***.

For Gloria Naylor and many other feminists, "history" constitutes the divergent global strains of the same narrative that promotes the story of triumphant manhood while disregarding any possible relevance of womanhood. In other words, history is the story of humanity that has too often been told from the sole viewpoint of the man. Any role that women have played in the story has been belittled, even erased. "Herstory" is the feminist's attempt at reclamation of the lost stories that recount the value of women. The mission is approached in myriad ways, and Naylor approaches it through the names of both women and men to achieve parity in the global narrative that should have existed from the beginning. While Naylor uses character names to balance history and herstory, she also uses the names to equalize African/African-American tradition and Western ideology. In fact, she includes traditional African naming practices, out of which full stories unfold as the names are closely studied.

Although many African American authors have given colorful names to their characters and have revealed names like Toni Morrison's Milkman Dead and Stamp Paid, Gloria Naylor is among the first novelists to explore the naming practice from an *Afrofemtheological* position - that perspective which brings together a three-pronged analysis tool using Afrocentrism, Feminism, and Theology/Spirituality. Oddly, the scholarship regarding naming in Naylor's novels is miniscule although the writer's use of naming patterns is explicit. In an interview, Naylor comments on the absence of critical material concerning her naming strategies. She states:

> [. . .] I would like someday for someone to look at the importance of naming, the whole act of naming, names themselves within my work because that's real conscious when I play certain games with that. (The Critical Response to Gloria Naylor 262)

Like the antiqued trove of women's names secreted in the Nedeed cellar in Linden Hills, Naylor's masterful use of names lies in wait for discovery. The charge of this present work is to excavate the essence of Naylor's character names in order to reveal their variegated dynamics. Guided by an *Afrofemtheological* perspective, "His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café," will expose Gloria Naylor's deliberate name manipulations that ultimately undermine the menacing presence of patriarchy in the lives of Naylor's characters.

In Linden Hills, Gloria Naylor adeptly assumes her role as herstorian. Until Willa Prescott Nedeed discovers letters and recipes that have been secretly archived in basement chests, the Nedeed wives are only known individually as Mrs. Nedeed. When Willa finds Luwana Nedeed's relics, she notes that Luwana is "one of the many mothers that Luther never talked about" (93). Willa's perusal of the life remnants of former Nedeed wives leads to an intimate awareness of her predecessors. This newfound knowledge of the women's identities ushers her to her own search for self-identity. She begins with her first name and takes the reader back to her childhood when she asks her mother why she was named Willa: "She remembered asking her [mother] once and being told that she just liked the rhythm; it was lyrical and delicate" (277). Willa continues her search for self by reflecting upon her maiden name: "[. . .] but the name Prescott had come from her father. It had belonged to his father before that. So there was little choice on his part about her last name" (278). Her final confrontation of her choice of the Nedeed name is one of the most poignant events in the novel:

> [. . .] she wanted the name Willa Nedeed. She wanted to walk around and feel that she had a perfect right to respond to a phone call, a letter, an

> invitation – any verbal or written request directed toward that singular identity. (278)

Besides providing the information that necessitates Willa's self-discovery, Naylor's herstoric account reveals a story of hidden torment and self-abuse for the other Nedeed wives. Luwana enacts daily attacks of self-mutilation by cutting herself. Evelyn purges her food regularly and finally commits suicide. Priscilla McGuire Nedeed simply dissolves in the overwhelming desolation of the Nedeed world. However, the horrendous realities of these women only become known when their names are illumined.

The geographical spaces represented in Mama Day – Willow Springs, Africa, the Caribbean, Denmark, and Norway - are implicated in the names of the novel's characters. For instance, Willow Springs owes its name to Hamlet, not an over-abundance of island willow trees. In fact, there are no willow trees on the island. The quote, "There is a *willow* grows askaunt the *brook,*" describes the setting of Ophelia's drowning in Hamlet (IV.vii). The willow tree and the water of the brook connect to distinguish Ophelia's place of death. Likewise, in Willow Springs many fall prey to the power of water. Actually, four residents of Willow Springs die by water - one in a well, one in the Sound, and two by hurricane. Purposefully, Gloria Naylor connects the pathology of this early Ophelia especially to two Mama Day characters named Ophelia. Sapphira, a Sycorax figure reminiscent of The Tempest and the Great Mother figure in Mama Day, conjures images of both Africa and the Caribbean isles. Also, Norway is implicated in the island drama in Norwegian Bascombe Wade who is a slave master and the rumored biological father of the Day clan. Nonetheless, it is his last name that serves as a faint backdrop to the novel's action as wading in water takes on deathly connotations for many of the characters.

Intercontinental and intertextual histories converge in Naylor's second Ophelia in Mama Day, "the child of Grace." In order to escape the omen prescribed by Shakepeare's character and followed by Naylor's elder Ophelia, the second Ophelia is given the pet name, Cocoa. Cocoa's great-grandmother, the first Ophelia in Naylor's novel, drives herself to insanity after the loss of her daughter Peace. Additionally, she finally commits suicide by drowning, echoing the Hamlet namesake who suffers a similar demise after the death of her father. Ironically, Cocoa's own battle with insanity comes as a result of self-hatred issues central to her pet name, not the name "Ophelia." Throughout her life, she attempts to mask the pale color that she believes to have come from her Scandanavian ancestor, Bascombe Wade. This internal battle with self-identity ultimately manifests itself in a dark struggle between the grotesque and the real.

George, Cocoa's husband, experiences dire consequences for his ignorance of name potency. Precisely because George is not privy to his family name history, George is unable to fully appreciate his destiny. From his birth in Bailey's Café, the reader learns that George is a Christ-child. In Mama Day, the reader learns that he is raised in a boys' shelter with no knowledge of his actual ancestry. He does not know that he is the product of a virgin birth. He does not know that his mother was a Falasha Jew from the African continent. Because he does not have a name that translates his messiahship or his divine lineage such as Emmanuel (God with Us), he remains disconnected from his life's purpose. In fact, George is an anomaly, a messiah without faith.

Giving the historical context to the naming of her characters, Gloria Naylor serves as a more effective ethnographer than the one who came "[. . .] dragging his notebooks and tape recorder [. . .], all excited and determined to put Willow Springs on the map"

(7). Naylor indelibly fixes Willow Springs on the maps of her readers' psyches, not the fixed document that is a western construct. The narrator who opens the novel suggests that the true ethnographer should just listen to the natural ebb and flow of the island. Only from such observance, the narrator suggests, can one obtain authentic cultural information. Naylor's success in displaying the cultural practices of her characters comes also from a desire to preserve rather than to exploit, unlike the eager ethnographer that she mentions.

While Gloria Naylor serves as ethnographer in Mama Day, she is scriptural revisionist in Bailey's Café. Naylor's new role is indicated upon the entrance of Bailey's Café's first customer. Eve arrives at the café after being evicted from her home in Pilottown by her guardian, Godfather. Eve, like her biblical predecessor, is a mother figure. Down the street from Bailey's Café, she opens a boardinghouse/brothel as a refuge for single women who need a retreat from the patriarchal abuses that threaten their day-to-day lives. Entering Bailey's Café on her way to Eve's is Esther, who comes to Eve's after twelve years of sexual and emotional torture. Jesse Bell arrives at the brownstone with a heroin addiction and the embarrassment of a failed marriage and a much-publicized lesbian relationship. Mariam is a fourteen year-old mentally challenged Falasha Jew who arrives at Eve's a pregnant virgin saying, "No man has ever touched me" (143).

Reminiscent of the time between the Fall of Man and Jesus' birth, the women's names in Bailey's Café illustrate that the suppression of the female gender has prevented the wholeness of humanity as God designed. According to feminist theology, the divine plan of Genesis makes for a perfectly balanced

humanity in the androgyne. The point on which the feminist argument rests is Genesis 1:27 as Moses records, "[. . .] male and female he created them." More specifically, the argument suggests that God made the original humans equally male and female. In other words, feminist theologians argue that every human being is both male and female at the same time.

Along these lines of androgyny, Naylor develops Eve first then finally Miss Maple, a man who is as comfortable in a dress as he is in his manhood. In between these two figures are Esther, Jesse Bell, and Mariam who represent the historically ignored and abused female gender. The reclamation of these stories restores the marginalized figures to wholeness. Eve and Miss Maple demonstrate the ideal of humanity, androgyny. The reclamation of Esther, Jesse Bell, and Mariam allows the world to hear women's stories from the female point of view. The biblical stories that have been perpetuated for centuries tell the stories from a male point of view absent of any admittance of abuse, classism, racism, or sexism. At least the process toward wholeness begins when one is able to tell his or her own narrative. Naylor's characters begin this process in Bailey's Café.

Each Gloria Naylor novel builds upon the legacy of the one set before it. Linden Hills comes out of Women of Brewster Place, Mama Day sprouts from Linden Hills, and Bailey's Café is intertwined with Mama Day. A similar pedigree is present in terms of Naylor's character names. The author even constructs an actual pedigree in Mama Day that is specific to the novel's characters. The connections that she makes between characters and their names are not exercises in futility. They actually tell several stories themselves that coincide with the main movement of Naylor's novels. All of the Naylor

novels are about wholeness and how each person - woman, man, child, Black, Jew, etc. - can achieve such wholeness. One way to reach wholeness, Naylor suggests, is by the exploration of self-identity that is begun in the examination of our names.

## Review of Criticism

The criticism on Gloria Naylor is voluminous; however, criticism on the specific topic of naming in Naylor's works is rather scant. A few scholars have included naming practices within the scope of their broader topics. Still, additional critics have studied the general concept of naming in African American literature. Debra Walker King's Deep Talk: Reading African-American Literary Names is key among them. I also draw from the body of writing on historical naming customs, especially among African peoples. In addition, general feminist theological criticism and feminist criticism yield helpful scholarly references.

Among all of the related articles found regarding Mama Day, Helene Christol's work is the most similar to my "His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café". In her article, "Reconstructing American History: Land Genealogy in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day," she points to names as being key to uncovering the genealogy of the Day family. Christol considers the names to be owned just as the Days own their land. She even recognizes that the knowledge of names ultimately leads to the discovery of self; however, Christol directs this perspective only to the Day family. Nothing is said of the significance of other characters' names in the novel.

Peter Erickson, in his article "'Shakespeare's Black?': The Role of Shakespeare in Naylor's Novels," briefly discusses what he calls the "double naming" of Miranda/Mama

Day and Ophelia/Cocoa. According to Erickson, "Miranda" recalls the innocence of Shakespeare's "Miranda" in The Tempest while Mama Day's conjuring surpasses Prospero's magic. Erickson's most notable critique is that Naylor demonstrates a "multicultural approach to literary studies" by incorporating Shakespeare in Mama Day. Furthermore, this critic notes that Naylor does not form a bond of kinship with Shakespeare. Quite contrarily, according to Erickson, Naylor decentralizes Shakespeare. He states, " Shakespeare does not assimilate Naylor; Naylor assimilates Shakespeare" (246).

The works of a few feminist theologians have been selected to aid in the analysis of the present thesis. On the list are Mary Daly and Susan Niditch. Daly's Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation is one of the seminal works in the area of feminist theology. In the work, Daly discusses several biblical figures and pays particular attention to the creation story figures. For further support on feminist analysis, the paper depends on the general critical works of feminist criticism with particular leanings toward the works of black feminist critic, Barbara Christian.

## Methodology

"His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café," utilizes an Afrofemtheological perspective to illustrate Gloria Naylor's sweeping diatribe against patriarchy. Congruent with Naylor's standing as an African American feminist and ex-evangelist of Christianity is this Afrofemtheological lens. The commingling of the theory's three components - naming practices in East and West Africa, general feminist theory, and feminist theological issues – renders a uniquely designed theoretical triptych poised in its suitability to each novel.

Although the approach has broader relevance in Mama Day, it is directly applicable to the power of the Day name - a moniker that borrows from the Judeo-Christian Creation Story and perpetuates throughout generations regardless of the presence of married names. Also, the Afrofemtheological framework is particularly appropriate for the analysis of character names in Bailey's Café. For instance, examination of the Mary character, a Falasha Jew who bears a Christ-child, would be grossly incomplete without the latitude provided by such a broad perspective. Finally, the mere discovery of the names of the Linden Hills sister-wives yields feminist significance. Additionally, these names are laced by Holy Scripture and reminiscent of the self-defining prophecy inherent in African naming practices. Overall, the Afrofemtheological perspective is the singular approach able to burrow through Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café, revealing Naylor's ubiquitous efforts to usurp the threatening power of patriarchy in the lives of her characters.

## Limitations of Study

The limitations of the study, "His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café," are numerous. The first hindrance to the fulfillment of this study is the paucity of criticism regarding naming practices in Naylor's novels. General Gloria Naylor criticism is widely published, but the focus of this study finds little support or kinship in the scholarly community. The secondary support must be drawn from the modicum of resources that address, even briefly, the naming practices in Naylor's body of work. In addition, support must be gathered from the plethora of resources on African naming practices, general feminist and feminist theological theory.

While the scarcity of criticism presents possible problems, the originality of the framework is also a potential point of difficulty. Since the theoretical approach is three-sided, there is potential for fragmentation in the thesis. However, the static focus of naming throughout the study gels the writing into a solid critical analysis. This avant-garde effort has the potential for making considerable impact on Naylor scholarship. Any reservations that might present themselves because of the novelty of the proposal should be overcome by the same innovation of the idea.

## Significance of Study

As mentioned in the "Limitations of Study" section of this introduction, "His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café" will add significantly to the burgeoning body of Gloria Naylor scholarship. Although Gloria Naylor has been a published novelist for approximately ten years, the critical material on her literature is still in its infancy. In preparation for this thesis, I took note of the lacunae in Naylor scholarship. Far from exhaustive, my study will add to the body of criticism regarding Naylor's works. Furthermore, the impact of "His-story, Her-story: Names Making Our-story in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, Mama Day, and Bailey's Café" will be considerable.

Naylor's works have been frequently viewed as models of intertextuality, but heretofore none of her works have been viewed as this thesis suggests. The three novels of discussion constitute the melding of African and Western literary and cultural tradition through the universal human possession of names. Also, scholarship on all three novels has touted the author for her discourse on the reappropriation of land from Whites to

African Americans whereas this study will highlight the equal import of name ownership for African Americans.

The unique theoretical approach to be used in the thesis will prove a tremendous addition to the body of African American literary criticism. Although the spiritual component of African American women's novels has been discussed often in literary scholarship, few if any have observed the inextricable bond of these women's religiousity, feminism, and Afrocentrism.

## CHAPTER 2

## NAMES MIRRORING FACELESSNESS IN LINDEN HILLS

> [. . .] the omnipresent, omnipotent, Almighty Divine is simply the *will* to possess. It had chained the earth to the names of a few and it would chain the cosmos as well.
>
> Luther Nedeed, Linden Hills

The mention of the "will to possess" might resonate thoughts of the heavenly realm where some celestial being exacts his/her "will" upon human subjects. Quite conversely though, in the horrendous years of American slavery, the same concept ushered forth visions of hell for the Africans who were enslaved. White men had become the possessors – of land, of wealth, but most importantly, of Africans themselves. In the aftermath of such a terrible stage in history as Gloria Naylor picks up the tale in Linden Hills, blacks have clamored for the "will to possess" suburban estates, luxury cars, and other opulence – almost anything of ostensible glamour. However, the characters of Linden Hills have forgotten that the self was the most prized possession during the long years of slavery. Gloria Naylor's excoriation of her characters' lives and other such duplications of the Black bourgeoisie across America exposes the face of spiritual, black, and gendered celebration that is rapidly evanescing in an atmosphere of forgetting the past and forging toward strong financial futures.

Key to Gloria Naylor's second novel is a methodically positioned series of names that undermines expectations of race and gender and exclaims the salvific elements of

self-identity. Debra Walker King, in Deep Talk: Reading African-American Literary Names, comments: "Black writers challenge the silencing and dehumanizing implications of being named or unnamed by an empowered, hostile, and often racist other" (56). Gloria Naylor touches the same patterns, but she expands to include other import of gender and spirituality. Characters relinquish their divinity, for their names are divine whether having root in the Judeo-Christian tradition or finding locus in a feminine pantheon or a heaven of blackness. Helene Cristol, in "Reconstructing American History: Land Genealogy in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day," adds: "Whether these names are found in old recipe books or discarded letters and papers forgotten in a cellar but finally brought to light by the last epiphany of Linden Hills, [. . .] they form the core of the narration" (159).

Central to the story is Luther Nedeed's definition of the divine being the "will to possess." Consequently, the story is focused on the struggle between the stronger of two wills – one character, Willie, possesses a self-definition that is planted in proper cultural context and another, Willa, finds satisfaction within the expectations of patriarchy and the denial of familial roots. Grace Collins, in "Narrative Structure in Linden Hills" agrees somewhat: "It is the wills of these two protagonists that unite two seemingly episodic, disparate narratives which coalesce in a frightening denouement" (81).

Mired in Naylor's scenario is patriarchal history that has defined the wife by her husband's name. This too, is problematic in Linden Hills. Coupled with the damaging legacy of slavery, Naylor's name game leaves the Nedeed wives, especially, victims of a brand of merchandising reflective of the purchase of "nameless" slaves by white slave masters. Only one black character is portrayed as an actual slave master in the nineteenth

century as he keeps the papers of his wife's purchase from a Mississippi plantation; however, this pattern is inculcated in his descendants who follow suit to buy other nameless wives or ones willing to become so for the right price.

Willa and Willie exemplify the diametric forces working in the will to possess, but between them is a host of other characters who achieve various name-related levels of facelessness. Charles Toombs, in his article, "The Confluence of Food and Identity in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills: 'What We Eat is Who We Is,'" mentions facelessness as one of Naylor's main contentions in the novel: "The novel [. . .] devotes a significant amount of its attention to detailing the ways in which some African Americans efface themselves as they try to be both Americans and African Americans" (Toombs 88). For instance, ironically, Laurel's very name implies "winner," yet she gives up the weight of her name that carries with it the memories of her grandmother so that she can become a winner in the black upper middle class and in the boardroom of IBM where she is one of few blacks. Willa's true last name, Day, is divine as will be expounded in the next chapter on Naylor's third novel Mama Day, yet she assumes the Nedeed name to be worshipped by women who have not married such a prominent name. Since the closer the residents get to Luther in address, the more nameless they become, it is fitting that Willa is the most damaged. Maxwell Smyth cannot really be considered as real. He is simply a caricature of a man, proudly functioning without the normal attributes owned by humanity. Only Luther Nedeed is fully real, concretized by history books and a seemingly everlasting name.

The epigraph of the novel is a conversation between one of the prominent characters, Lester Tilson, and his grandmother, Grandma Tilson, in which the two talk

about hell. To be in hell, Grandma Tilson tells her grandson, "you just gotta sell that silver mirror God propped up in your soul [. . .] to the highest bidder." As characters give up the prized possession of self-identity, the name, the act of unnaming threatens the silver mirror God that Grandma Tilson speaks of, relegating those who sell to a hell on earth. Essentially, the silver mirror God is the divine reflection of self that most Linden Hills residents sell to be a part of the upwardly yet downwardly mobile thrust for success that is Linden Hills.

Ultimately, Naylor says that mirroring Nedeed in his moral bankruptcy demands a sacrifice of self-identity, a facelessness. It is because Nedeed realizes this very power in naming that he withholds a name from his son. Especially in the case of the Nedeed lineage, knowing one's name is tantamount to knowing exactly who one is. In West African tradition, the absence of a name translates to the absence of existence. Accordingly, a whole slew of social ties are negated simply for not existing, not being named.

Linden Hills is an insular corner of upwardly mobile Blacks chasing the declivous spiral toward the house of the Linden Hills liege, namesake and scion of many Luther Nedeeds before him. The most spiritually and culturally in tact live at the top on First Crescent Drive while the increasingly disappearing spirits live closer to Fifth Crescent Drive and Tupelo Drive near Nedeed. Linden Hills is a northern nondescript suburb that caters only to the special kind of African American who is willing to sell his or her soul to be among those living in one of the exclusive residences managed by the Tupelo Realty Corporation, owned by the Nedeeds for generations by the novels outset.

Residents can be of any social class or economic strata; nonetheless, most of them are corporate climbers.

Those chosen by Luther Nedeed to be one of few Linden Hills residents must agree to only three things: 1) the house should stay in the family; 2) if the house must be sold, it must be sold to another African American; and 3) the property can only be gained after signature of a thousand-year-and-a-day lease. Although, at first glance, the policy seems to be one that champions the cause of black prosperity and posterity, the all-important last contingency demands that residents tie both themselves and future generations to the Nedeed family. This arrangement equates to a virtual selling of oneself to the devil as the residents sacrifice the most germane parts of their inner selves to live in the ultra-urbane enclave.

Luther Nedeed's extirpation of those who have a firm hold on their inner beings begins in his realization that such self-definition is dangerous to the fulfillment of his empire. In the early days of his realty company, he describes: "There were some up there who had rooted themselves in the beliefs that Africa could be more than a word; slavery hadn't run its course; there was salvation in Jesus and salve in the blues" (11). At once, he has positioned his tenants in a Christian, African, and African American support structure. His mission becomes the erasure of all of those systems. He succeeds in his expunging by eliminating the priority of the name.

Luther Nedeed's appellation is the first indication of Naylor's name game. Noted frequently in Naylor scholarship to translate to "de-Eden" ("of Eden", according to Naylor in a personal interview), "Nedeed" conjures images of the once verdant landscape of the first garden but with obvious converse connotations from the idyllic place of

perfection. At its very inception, Linden Hills steps into an already long and nefarious history of Nedeeds. Each generation of Nedeeds tells the same story: "[. . .] the baby was male and had the father's complexion, protruding eyes, and first name – by now it had come to be expected" (7). Although Nedeed's name translates to "of Eden," it can also be understood as "de-Eden," to separate from. In his eternal patriarchal system, Luther aims to de-Eden all of the characters, to take them from an already perfect or divine state to situate them in his hell on earth because living without identity is really hell. Catherine Ward's comments in "Linden Hills: A Modern Inferno" complement:

> Gloria Naylor's second novel, Linden Hills, is a modern version of Dante's Inferno in which souls are damned not because they have offended God or have violated a religious system but because they have offended themselves. In their single-minded pursuit of upward mobility, the inhabitants of Linden Hills, a black, middle-class suburb, have turned away from their past and from their deepest sense of who they are. Naylor feels that the subject of who-we-are and what we are willing to give up of who-we-are to get where-we-want-to-go is a question of the highest seriousness – as serious as a Christian's concern over his salvation. (182)

The rupture of gendered, spiritual, and racial identification in most of the characters calls for the type of salvation that Ward mentions, but in their "will to possess" they give into the "will of the father" – Luther Nedeed's words. Eventually, relinquishing identity to the claws of Luther Nedeed becomes the way to "win" in a climate of corporate pursuits and social climbing.

Interestingly, the novel's only suicide victim, Laurel Dumont, has a name that implies "winner" if reminiscing on the Olympic sign of victory. In fact, she is an Olympic hopeful in her pre-college days when she still has some rootedness in her southern family ties, specifically with her grandmother. Laurel forgets the weight of her name so that she can become a winner in social circles and at IBM. Roberta, Laurel's

grandmother, is the first to notice that the child she named has disappeared: "[. . .] she had cashed in her life insurance to send a child she had named Laurel Johnson to the state of California, and it sent her back a stranger" (226-227). However, Laurel does not notice her slow but mounting disappearance until years later. During a trip to Georgia to rediscover herself at her grandmother's house, she is glad that there are no mirrors to tell her that she is no longer the Olympic dreamer who enjoyed summers in the South (203). Upon her return to Linden Hills, she realizes that she has no home if not her grandmother's home. Her frantic search for her self begins with a look at her pictured past:

> [. . .] the Phi Beta Kappa pictures in her yearbook, front page of the *New York Times* business section, the bridal pictures in the Dumont family album. All before her twenty-fifth birthday, and in all of them she had been smiling. No wonder the world pronounced her happy, and like a fool she had believed them [. . .]. And when she finally took a good look around, she found herself imprisoned within a chain of photographs and a life that had no point. She had kept driving because the memory told her that there was a point at the clearing of those pine trees. And wedged into it was a house, an old woman, and a beginning. (228)

The words "a beginning" suggest a place to start for a cultural renewal for Laurel, perhaps even a spiritual one suggestive of the creative force inherent in the words "in the beginning," but there is no rejuvenation for Laurel because she refuses to begin anew right where she is.

In Laurel's identity crisis, she secludes herself in her house and submerges herself in the "classics" of Rachmaninoff, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler. Offered an alternative in blues legends Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, she rejects them: "Women who got their identities through a crop of worthless men they let drag them down? All that moaning about Jim Crow, unpaid bills, and being hungry has nothing to do with me

or what I'm going through" (236). Unbeknownst to her, that *is* what she is going through. Hence, the bills and letters have piled up on the table, including the letter from her husband declaring a divorce. Furthermore, Nedeed is the one who tells her that she must leave because her husband has filed for divorce and no longer wishes to live in Linden Hills. Luther says:

> Whatever is *in* this house and whatever you've added *to* this house is between you and your husband to divide by whatever laws of whatever century you choose. But Howard Dumont has decided that there are to be no more Dumonts at Seven Twenty-Two Tupelo Drive, and according to the original terms of the lease, that's how things must stand. (244-245)

By ending the terms of the lease, Howard separates the Dumont name from Linden Hills. With this single act, he gives hope to future generations of Dumonts that they will retain their faces and identities.

In order to survive, Laurel must realize that she does not have to trade Bessie and Billie for Beethoven. Her grandmother is willing to embrace both (237). There must not be a dichotomy. For there is "salve in the blues" in spite of Needed's disputation. Also, Laurel must remember that she is a winner in order to live. She neither acknowledges Bessie and Billie nor remembers her onomastic victory. After turning her back on her culture in the crux of an already seismic inner self, Laurel completely loses face when she loses her title too, "Mrs. Dumont." The local historian, Dr. Braithwaite, refers to Laurel as Mrs. Dumont. Thus, the history books will read that she has no real identity.

Laurel is only one of many characters who suffers from facelessness, but she is the only one to commit suicide under the pressure of it. Willie is the first to reach her after she dives off her diving board into her empty olympic-size pool:

> From the angle of her neck, she couldn't possibly be alive, but he had the irrational fear that she might be suffocating with her nose pressed so

> firmly into the bottom of the pool. Without thinking, he turned her over. **Her face was gone.** (249)

In the case of Laurel, only when she is stripped of the connection to her husband and the accoutrements of his name does she become completely faceless. Luther suggests that there might be hope of remaining in Linden Hills only if Laurel remarries and then only if Luther is willing to negotiate a contract with her new husband (245). Interestingly, Grandma Tilson is the only woman allowed to live in Linden Hills without a man. Also of important note, she is the only one who refuses to sell the "silver mirror God propped up in [her] soul."

According to Catherine Ward, Laurel Dumont has already reached the professional plateau to which Maxwell Smyth aspires (184). Ward describes Smyth: "[. . .] he is the highest ranking black executive at General Motors. But the price for such advancement has been high: Smyth has given up his racial identity" (184). In Maxwell Smyth, an executive who has so regulated and neutralized his being that his "s--- don't stink," to borrow a phrase from American vernacular, Gloria Naylor demonstrates the most unnatural conditions that result from cultural, gender, and spiritual discontinuation. "Maxwell had discovered long ago that he doubled the odds of finishing first if he didn't carry the weight of that milligram of pigment in his skin" (102). This movement toward neutrality begins with his name and the realization that his name upsets assumptions about him:

> He remembered the slate-blue eyes of his first grade teacher flying back to his small dark face when she handed him a name tag reading MAXWELL SMITH and he told her no – S-M-Y-T-H, and this time the eyes actually focused him into existence. Whether it was impatience, embarrassment, or faint amusement, it was still recognition. For that moment, he counted because he had upset an assumption. And Maxwell Smyth learned to drag that moment out by not aiding the clumsy attempts of receptionists, clerks,

> and arrogant booking agents as they grappled with reordering their ingrained expectations of his name and his being. He relished the feelings of power and control as his blackness momentarily diminished in front of their faces – an ordinary name had turned into the extraordinary and taken its owner with it in the transformation. (103)

Using his name as a launch pad, Maxwell goes far beyond his name to make himself neutral, thereby cutting himself off from the normal flow of humanity. In this way, as a neutral person having no allegiance to any one group, he is the ultimate threat by seeming to be a threat to no one. Besides his refusal to carry the "burden" of his skin color, Maxwell also finds his performance as a male to be cumbersome. He is neither interested nor able to lead a woman to orgasm nor is he able to obtain erection, showing, in symbol at least, that he is not really a man:

> And Maxwell retained his mental health by exercising the same type of control over every aspect of his being. Since he couldn't manipulate the weather outside his home, he adjusted his body accordingly; but once inside his carefully appointed duplex, an elaborate series of humidifiers and thermostats enabled him to determine the exact conditions under which he would eat, sleep, or sit. He found the erratic rhythms and temperatures that normally accompany sex a problem, so he rarely slept with a woman. He didn't consider it a great deprivation because before he was even thirty, an erection had become almost as difficult to achieve as an orgasm, and hence he would save himself the trouble until he was married and just had to. In short, his entire life became a race against the natural – and he was winning. (104)

Gloria Naylor highlights the phenomenon of facelessness and namelessness among African Americans who have reached the supposed highest echelons of living without their identities still intact. With such a moral and cultural bankruptcy, even the children become nameless and faceless. This happens to the last Nedeed son. Because he does not fit the mold of his patriarchal lineage since he is light skinned, he is unnamed by his father. He does not inherit the name that is actually his by birthright. Located in the midst of a dark-skinned people, the child is ultimately faceless as well. Willa recalls:

"He was just learning to write his name. His father had said that he didn't care what she called him, so she had taught him to spell Sinclair" (294). Only his mother gives him a name, and she eventually gives him a face when she tells him that he looks like his grandmother:

> Sinclair: Why don't I look like Daddy? [. . .]
> Willa: Do you see this picture? Well, that's your grandmother and you look like her.
> Sinclair: But I'm a boy. She's a girl.
> Willa: So, boys can look like girls. And don't you think she's a pretty lady?
> [. . .] Yes, you looked like your grandmother. And the mother before that. And the mother before that. Oh, my baby, what have I done to you? With horror she saw the answers forming through image after image strung out by white hot links webbing themselves among the crevices in her brain. (93)

It is Nedeed's genetic pool, not Willa's, that results in Sinclair's light skin. Unprecedented in the Nedeed line is identification based on both a female and a male. Willa teaches her son that a man need not only look to his patrilineal self to find identity. Simply because the Nedeed culture does not allow for every story to be told – only those of the dark-skinned Nedeeds are recorded by Dr. Braithwaite – some characteristic that has never been named before goes unnamed. More succinctly, the former light-skinned Nedeed wives have no singular identities. The Nedeed husbands never address their wives by their first names. The wives are simply called Mrs. Nedeed; therefore, Nedeed finds increased difficulty in naming his son. Nedeed has no name for the face he sees in his progeny.

Although Luther has the authority to name, he gives up the power in naming when he does not name his son Luther as well. This act is the beginning of the destruction of Linden Hills. Without another Luther, the place is doomed to fail. In fact,

the empire crumbles under the pressure of Sinclair's perpetual and eternal limbo. A Yoruba proverb reads, "There is nothing that there is not; whatever we have a name for, that is" (Benston 9). In West African culture, traditionally, children are only named after it is certain that they will live. The naming often comes after a few days or a few weeks. Sinclair is alive five years, and Luther refuses to name him. In this act, Nedeed skews the original African intent of the practice that makes sure the child does not die before the naming. Perhaps, in his evil deed, Luther hopes to actually kill the son who eventually does die.

Without familial context, the child succumbs to death. Sinclair has his mother's love, but it is the relationship between the males that is the lifeblood in the Nedeed family. In fact, Sinclair had passed the age at which Nedeed children are weaned from their mothers to learn the ways of the family business. Traditionally, once the Nedeed son can "take solid food without harm," he becomes inseparable from his father (119). Of course, this is not the case with Sinclair. However morally depraved the connection between Nedeed father and son, it is nevertheless essential to the survival of Nedeed males. Naylor mentions no illness that besets the child, so I postulate that it is the absence of the patrilineal link that kills the boy. Luther assumes that his son's light skin and deviation from Nedeed tradition implicates Willa in some evil act: "Somewhere inside of her must be a deep flaw or she wouldn't have been capable of such treachery. Everything she owned he had given her – even her name – and she had thanked him with this?" (19). For the act that Luther perceives as evil, his son suffers: "The child went unnamed and avoided by his father for the first five years of his life and Luther tried to discover what had brought such havoc into his home" (18).

Throughout the novel, assumptions are made of characters based on their names. Lester Tilson's mother assumes that a common African American naming tradition is the result of lack of imagination rather than a cultural staple. When she realizes that "Willie" is not an abbreviated "William" and that the middle initial "K." is Willie's middle name, she says, "It just never occurred to me that people lacked such imagination they had to resort to giving a child a letter for a name" (49). Even after Willie and Lester "school" Lester's mother about African American naming practices, she will not accept them as valid. Lester informs his mother of black southern naming tradition with some admiration for it; however, he holds his own name with some disdain:

> He turned to Willie innocently. "'Did you know my full name is Lesterfield Walcott Montgomery Tilson, Willie? Or is it Lester *Field*walcott Montgomery Tilson, Mom? They had to type those letters so close together on my birth certificate it's hard to make them out now.'" (50).

Mrs. Tilson rebuts: "'I gave you a name that I thought would fit the heights I hoped you'd climb. It was a great name for what I dreamed would be a great man. Needless to say – '" (50). A name like Willie's, Willie K. Mason, ensures cultural continuity whereas Lester's, Lesterfield Walcott Montgomery Tilden, does not. Willie's name is a reminder of his southern roots. Lester's mother says that she named Lester to be the great man that she had hoped that he would be, but she named him outside of her own cultural context, calling her own "unimaginative." So in giving Lester such a name, she positions him at a disadvantage at the starting gate of life.

Only because of his comfort with his own African American identity is Willie able to see the dis-ease of the other characters. Willie is from Putney Wayne, the

community of financially poor blacks who live adjacent to Linden Hills. Accompanied by his friend Lester, a Linden Hills resident from First Crescent Drive, he completes odd jobs for extra money during the week before Christmas. While working in Linden Hills, he studies with a critical eye the dis-ease of facelessness and its accompanying namelessness so prevalent in the residents despite their great wealth. The closer they get to Nedeed's house, the more Willie notices the extremes of identity removal. He reflects:

> All those dreams this week were about Linden Hills. But you were supposed to dream about things after they happened, not before. Yet it had happened with that woman who killed herself. He had dreamed that she would have no face. No, he was the one who had had no face, but it was still about her. In fact, all those dreams had been about women and none of them had had names until now. He knew her name was Laurel. God, how could he ever forget that name after yesterday?
>
> Now there was nothing left to dream about but Nedeed. What was that woman like down there in Nedeed's house? He had never heard her name. A whole week in Linden Hills and he had never heard her name. (273)

When Willie asks Lester if he has ever seen Willa, Lester responds in the affirmative but adds: "'You know, it's funny, I've seen her a couple of times but I couldn't pick her out in that room right now. She's got the kind of face that wouldn't stand out in your mind – sorta average'" (83). Lester's comment is a further testament to female facelessness.

As indicated earlier by Maxwell Smyth, names do, indeed, have the awesome power to transform. Upon the acquisition of the Nedeed name, the Nedeed wives transform into faceless, nameless creatures, unnoticed by their neighbors, unnoted by the neighborhood historian, essentially and completely unidentifiable. Women lose their singular identities in the simple act of marriage as they exchange their maiden names for married ones. Also, in the process, they lose their first names as well, being infinitely called "Mrs. Nedeed." Naylor describes Luther Nedeed's recollection:

> He actually had to pause a moment in order to remember his mother's first name, because everyone – including his father – had called her nothing but Mrs. Nedeed. And that's all she had called herself. (18)

The Nedeed wives complete a process of unnaming. This process is antithetical to the African or prominent African American naming process of naming to give existence. This process also is an affront to feminist aims to retain identity even after marriage. The business of un-naming is a complex and horrid one because of its complete capability to deface and efface. Debra Walker King's definition of unnaming is helpful: "Unnaming (which, by the way, is not always pernicious) can be represented in three ways: through namelessness, the loss of a name, or the silencing of a name's enunciative capabilities" (King 21). The Nedeed wives, from the first to the penultimate, lose their maiden names, but Willa, the last Nedeed wife, both loses her name and experiences the silencing of her name's "enunciative capabilities." The name that she loses is "Prescott," her father's last name and her maiden name, but the name that loses its power is the "Day" name.

It is through Willie, a man confident in the cultural roots of his own name, that the reader comes to face the facelessness of the Nedeed wives and to understand the gravity of their absence. His awareness of the wives' lack of identity is apparent in the line of a poem that occurs to him after a recurring dream about Nedeed and Linden Hills: "There is a man in the house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name" (277). Also, through this concentration on the names of Nedeed wives, the reader comes to understand the complex relationship between name and identity that Naylor constructs. Nowhere else in the novel is the connection between the name and the facial identity made more clear. Laurel's situation is the beginning of the reader's acquaintance with

this correlation though. Willa seems to think that the Nedeed name will give her a different face, one that will negate the weight of her dark complexion. She finds later that a past Mrs. Nedeed tried to add color to her skin to give her presence, so that she could see her own identity that had been lost in the paleness of her skin and her soul. Gloria Naylor writes about the last Luther in reference to the subject:

> Luther had not followed the pattern of his fathers and married a pale-skinned woman. He knew those wives had been chosen for the color of their spirits, not their faces. They had been brought to Tupelo Drive to fade against the whitewashed boards of the Nedeed home after conceiving and giving over a son to the stamp and will of the father. (18)

After Luther refuses to accept Sinclair as his, he banishes Willa and their son to the basement to live on scraps of food and the water that he turns on intermittently. While in the basement and after Sinclair dies, Willa rummages through a basement trunk and finds the herstory of all of the Nedeed wives before her. Luwana Packerville is the first:

> Her hand touched a gauzy film and she pulled out the end of a long bridal veil trimmed in yellowing lace. It smelled of mildew and dust, but when she pressed a corner to her nose, there was a faint scent of lavender. She could wrap him [her dead son] in this – yards and yards of finely tatted lace and pearls. She kept pulling the material and it seemed to unravel forever so she dug into the trunk and extracted the folded veil. It was wrapped around a leather – and gold-bound Bible. LUWANA PACKERVILLE 1837 was etched in fading gold on the bottom border. She held the book stoically in her hand – There can be no God – and pressed her lips together. Then opening the cover, there in a delicate, curled scroll were those very words [. . . ]. Yes, whoever you were, Luwana Packerville, you were right about that. This house couldn't still be standing if there were a God. (93)

As her maiden name suggests, Luwana packs away her private pain, as so many women have done historically, in her religion. However, Luwana's dependence on the Bible yields other information as well. Luwana's placement of her letters in the Bible

speaks to the long held mission to be named by history and by Christianity. Luwana Packerville writes epistles addressed to herself. In placing them in the Bible, she imagines a saving gospel that is directed toward her, a woman. The only way to make this a reality is to write herself into the Bible, but this proves unfruitful. Luwana reminds the reader that facelessness and namelessness are not new phenomena to her nineteenth-century life. Her signification on the Bible suggests that she is neither named in Judeo-Christian tradition nor in nineteenth-century America. Furthermore, Luwana leaves the message about the non-existence of God in the veil-wrapped Bible to symbolize the abomination of the supposedly sacred institution of marriage, and if such a union can be so debased, so evil, then there must be no God.

The strike against Luwana's name is that it was most likely given to her by her slave mistress. Certainly, her last name was that of the slave master. Considering this in addition to the acquisition of the Nedeed name, Luwana is never privy to her own identification. Therefore, it becomes crucial to her to locate her self within a divine construct. Sadly, she does not find identification in the Bible either.

Three generations after the first Nedeed wife, Willa immediately finds kinship with Luwana. Their dialogue emanates from a vacuous personal disappearance that they experience in the Nedeed house. Both are bought. Both are made faceless by the evil in the Nedeed house. Both are unrecorded by history. The two wives in between, Evelyn Creton and Priscilla McGuire, experience likewise. In fact, Priscilla is a native of New Canaan, a Promised Land, and leaves it to go to the Hell of Luther's house. Debra Walker King's commentary on slave names is reminiscent of what happens to the Nedeed wives, and Naylor's text responds to this commentary as if in actual conversation:

[. . .] **slaves were often considered nameless after their capture and during their merchandising in America** [. . .]

**Luwana**: I thought my sale to him was only a formality. I thought in the name of decency my husband would have destroyed the evidence of my cursed bondage. But he keeps those documents securely locked away. O Blessed Saviour, can it be that I have only exchanged one master for another? (117)

**The last Luther**: He must have given her [Willa] at least six lines of credit *in his name*, never questioning what she bought or why. (68) [italics mine]

[. . .] **Captured Africans are listed in the ledgers of slave ships as Negroes, Slaves, and heads.**

And as the child faded to him against the clapboards of Tupelo Drive, Luther's eyes rested on the shadow floating through the carpeted rooms. It began to take form in front of his face. He noticed when it bent over and walked and sat down. He heard the lilt in the voice when it spoke. He distinguished between the colors that hung from the short frame and smelled the perfumed talc as it passed him. He could see the amber flecks in the heavily lashed eyes, the tiny scar on the right side of the lips. The long neck, small breasts, thick waist. *Woman.* (19) [italics mine]

**The criminal practices of such record keeping inaugurated the process of African unnaming despite European knowledge of African languages and naming traditions. Such crimes silence the indigenous name, erase the human face of blackness from view** [. . .]

**Willa's discovery of Priscilla, the third Nedeed wife**: **Her face was gone** [. . .] Priscilla McGuire ended at the neck – and without her features, she was only a flattened outline pressed beneath cellophane. The narrow chin, upturned nose, and deep fiery eyes were a beige blur between the shadows cast by the two grown men on each side of her. The entire face, the size of a large thumbprint, had been removed. This had been done on purpose. (249)

[. . .] **and inscribe a legacy of destruction** [. . .] **each time they are revisited and left unchallenged by historiographers** (King 49)

**Dr. Daniel Braithwaite, historian**: The Nedeeds have given me exclusive access to all of their family records: survey reports, official papers from the Tupelo Realty Corporation, even the original bills of sale that date back to 1820. Priceless information [. . .] (259).

> **Willie**: Then you know everything about the Nedeeds [. . .] I mean the wives and children and all? You've got their lives all in your books? (259)
>
> **Dr. Braithwaite**: The family is right out there [. . .]. You see Linden Hills and you see them. (259)

Dr. Braithwaite's deflection of Willie's question points to the neglect of the historian to include the wives and the children. Therefore, a tremendous void is in the history, making it, in effect, false.

Slavery's inheritable vices are quite apparent in Linden Hills. Luwana is literally owned by her husband, with the papers to prove it. She even writes that her son legally owns her as well:

> [. . .] he wants to celebrate his son's manumission. Since the law decrees that a child must follow the condition of its mother, I know he has gone to have the solicitor draw up free papers for the baby [. . .]. So it is a bitter meal that I must cook to help celebrate the fact that I am now to be owned by my own son. (119)

Willa is owned in the only way that a woman living in the twentieth century can be owned, by material wealth. Luther is well aware of this:

> He was no fool; he knew she would never have looked at him if it weren't for the feel of the name *Mrs. Luther Nedeed* as she slipped on that white satin and brocade, the cold smooth rings. The touch of the name in her silver, mahogany, and velvet. The smell of it in her imported colognes. The sight of it on thick, embossed invitations to the best homes in town. And the sound of the name – yes, the sound of the name on the tongues of the idiots who were panting and pushing to be somewhere in the corner of her memory. (69)

She is picked from a group of disenfranchised, desperate women who have not married by their tenth college reunion - "those who had lost that hopeful, arrogant strut" (67). Luther picks her out as if picking a slave from the slave market. He peruses over the

women who are not yet owned by a husband, those who are willing to be bought after ten years of professional success and singleness.

Mama Day, the novel subsequent to Linden Hills, reveals that Willa is a member of the Day family, a family in which the women hold onto their last names even after marriage. In Naylor's third novel, Willa's cousin, Cocoa, discusses this custom with her own husband, George, during a visit to the family graveyard:

> You explained that they were all Days so there was no need for surname. But what, as in your case, if a woman married? You live a Day and you die a Day. Early women's lib, I said with a smile. A bit more than that you answered. (218)

Cocoa's comment that keeping the Day name is "a bit more" "than early women's lib" signals a context more sacred than a feminist classification would explain. However, in direct contradiction to the family naming edict, Willa takes the name of Nedeed, selling her divinity in the process, for the name construction in Mama Day reveals that the Day lineage is divine. Although Willa recalls Mama Day and her herbal magic during her discovery of Evelyn Creton, Willa does not claim the consecrated family name. Instead, she concentrates on the lives of her sister-wives to redeem herself. Only after an intense journey through their life relics does she dare to look at her own name in order to restore her identity:

> Her name was Willa Prescott Nedeed. After thinking about it for hours, she knew she was safe starting from there. **She had owned that first *name* for as long as she had the *face* she was now certain that she possessed.** The aluminum pot was held firmly on her lap. Thirty-seven years ago she had been born and given the name Willa [. . .]. She didn't know how her mother decided upon the name Willa. She remembered asking her once and being told that she just liked the rhythm; it was lyrical and delicate (277)

She continues:

> [. . .] but the name Prescott had come from her father. It had belonged to his father and the father before that. So there was little choice on his part about her last name. (278)

The creative choice of her mother in naming her and the patriarchal passivity in her father since he had "little choice" in her last name contribute to Willa's attitude toward her name. She takes ownership of her first name and makes a correlation to her face. Her first name is the identifying marker, a fact easily forgotten in Nedeed's house since she is only called "Mrs. Nedeed." However, with so little thought put into her maiden surname, Willa desires the choice of her own last name that will be a "good name":

> Both of those people were now dead. The people who made Willa Prescott. But Willa Prescott Nedeed was alive, and she had made herself that. She imported the white satin pumps that took Willa Prescott down the aisle six years ago and brought her back up as Willa Prescott Nedeed. Her marriage to Luther Nedeed was her choice, and she took his name by choice. She knew then and now that there were no laws anywhere in this country that forced her to assume that name; she took it because she wanted to. That was important. She must be clear about that before she went on to anything else: she wanted to be a Nedeed. After all, every literate person in the Western world knew it was a good name. (278)

> Now, she wanted the name Willa Nedeed. She wanted to walk around and feel that she has a perfect right to respond to a phone call, a letter, an invitation – any verbal or written request directed toward that singular identity [. . .]. She became a wife and less than a year later she walked into Hyacinth Memorial, this time with leather moccasins on, and became a mother. (278-279)

As Luther informs the reader, none of the Nedeed wives have been recognized as having any other identity besides "Mrs. Nedeed." Therefore, Willa's idea of having the singular identity of "Willa Nedeed" is a fantasy. The identity of "Mrs. Nedeed" is not singular at all. It lumps her in with a group of other such named women who had no identities as well. Although Willa's desire to choose her own name is a creative and

commendable act, the thought process that she follows in making such a choice falls into the long-standing patriarchal framework that accounted for her father's surname inheritance. A more creative and empowering process would have been to reclaim the Day name:

> Willa Nedeed was a good mother and good wife. For six years, she could claim that identity without any reservations. But now Willa Nedeed sat on a cot in a basement, no longer anyone's mother or anyone's wife. So how did that happen? (279)

In "A Conversation," Gloria Naylor discusses with Toni Morrison Willa's choice to be a wife and mother:

> [. . .] when I put Willa in that basement my overall idea was to have this very conservative upper middle class black woman through her discovery of all those remnants from the past wives who'd lived in that house, just get up, walk out of there and say, 'No, this is shallow. This is not for me.' I wanted her to learn from those lessons in history. But what eventually evolved through all the pain that she went through was the discovery that she liked being where she was – a conventional housewife. And there is this moment when she says not only to the reader, but to me – 'I was a good wife and a good mother. And I'm not going to apologize to anyone for that.' That was a real surprise to me; I hadn't planned on the character doing that. But what her self-affirmation became was acknowledging her conventional position. You see, I used to believe that self-affirmation meant you had to be totally aconventional. But to keep a house, especially the way my mother kept her house – against all odds – is really a creative statement. So a woman's affirmation doesn't have to be an executive chair at IBM or something like that. (572-73)

According to Robert Paustian, "Surnames have been, by and large, a strictly European development, and have passed only recently into the naming practices of other nations" (180). Moreover, they became commonplace in a land far from Willa's great-great-grandmother's native land in West Africa. This information the reader learns in Mama Day. For both of the reasons mentioned above – the recent importance attributed to surnames and their Western construction –Willa's attachment to the last name is

perplexing. Additionally, considering the already mentioned import of the Day name, Willa's longing for the Nedeed name is ponderous. In her acquisition of the Nedeed name, Willa sells her name and soul. The act accounts for more than her position as a wife and mother. In choosing to assume the Nedeed name and define herself as only "a good wife and mother," she chooses not to be Willa Day.

Willa's severance from the Day family appears in Mama Day as Mama Day remembers Willa:

> [. . .] no reason for little Willa to carry on like she did, setting herself off from the family and breaking her mama's heart. She knew that high-society marriage was all bound to come to no good. Just before Hope passed, she sent them little Willa's wedding picture. Miranda remembers the face on Willa's husband - like a bottomless pit – and shudders. (39)

Symbolic is Willa's mother's name – Hope. Hope literally and figuratively dies after Willa takes the Nedeed name. Mama Day realizes the Nedeed name for what it is, evil. Also, Willa's separation from her family in light of her marriage shows that she is cut off from the support of her familial line. Perhaps, with familial continuity in addition to the discovery of the herstory of the Nedeed wives, she could have summoned the courage to overcome the "enunciative capabilities" of the Nedeed name. Sadly, at the end of Linden Hills, Willa and her dead son finally escape from their dungeon only to be swept up with Luther in an actual inferno. Lester and Willie witness this atrocity. Finally, it is the "Will" who is willing to remain true to his "silver mirror God" who survives.

If African Americans were unnamed through slavery as Debra Walker King suggests, then Linden Hills residents recast themselves in slavery by doing the same thing to themselves. As Gloria Naylor recasts Luther Nedeed in the master/devil role, she

portrays the reality of a type of slavery that transcends race to position even blacks as oppressors. In Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary, Naylor says this of women: "Slowly, with maturity, [. . .] I have seen that when women have assumed positions of power, they have not handled it better. If anything, they often have attempted to prove that they are better than men at being hard-nosed and pragmatic" (145). The same can be said for African Americans who wrested power from the white establishment only to implement the same type of oppression. Nedeed is the beacon of moral and cultural destruction in Linden Hills, and the people follow. Barbara Christian contributes her analysis of Linden Hills: "Ironically, not only have Linden Hills residents lost their identity, neither have they gained power" (123). This is quite true.

One of the few fragments of optimism in this novel seems to be the message that women do have the power to name and to be noticed. Willa's act of naming Sinclair and the appearance of the other sister-wives' genetic traits show that women have the power to name and to give identity; however, Willa misses this important lesson and defers to tradition. Even so, hope remains for characters like Kiswana Browne, a minor character in Linden Hills but a major one in The Women of Brewster Place. Kiswana assumes her African and feminine power to rename herself and to determine her community by moving out of Linden Hills. King sheds light on Kiswana's naming process:

> Kiswana unnames herself in an attempt to shape an identity that honors her African heritage. Like many blacks during the 1960s and 1970s, she does so by selecting a name from an "African" dictionary. This act of self-unnaming defies the traditions of the West African ancestors and spiritual forces she wishes to honor. In most African societies any change of name during adulthood occurs in honor of a momentous occasion or event that profoundly effects the individual or the community. The adult chooses a name of value not (55) only to the individual named but also to others associated with her or him. Ann duCille comments that Africans who honor these traditions would consider the act of random choice

> inherent in selecting a name from an 'African' dictionary 'something akin to a sacrilege.' Kiswana's attempt to define herself through a name selected from a dictionary is a social and political statement of resistance that unfortunately violates that with which she wishes to align herself. (King 54-55)

However misguided her naming process, Kiswana's aim is to recapture her true self, an exercise no other Linden Hills resident is willing to complete.

Kiswana leaves Linden Hills to develop a community, a feat impossible to accomplish in Linden Hills. The absence of such community has been detrimental to all of the characters, but especially to the women. Barbara Christian draws a striking correlation between the women of Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills and Avey in Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow in representation of female community:

> [. . .] the Nedeed women are isolated from other women as all traces of female values or of a distinct woman community are erased from Linden Hills [. . .] the Nedeed women lose their identity and sense of community. But while Avey is able to retrieve her true name because of her experience with her maternal ancestors, the Nedeed women are cut off from their own herstory and have no daughters to whom they can bequeath their own personal experience. By emphasizing these women's ignorance of their herstory as well as their sons' separation from them, Naylor revises Marshall's emphasis in all of her novels, of the continuity of community values, of "female values," among New World Blacks. Naylor suggests then that such values can be obliterated by the predominant class distinctions inherent in the urge to develop a patriarchy. (124-125)

It is clear that most of the Linden Hills characters volunteer for a life of hell on earth, but Naylor's concentration on the name and its reflection of self provides the possibility of reaching the divine, silver mirror God. Like the two novels following it, Mama Day and Bailey's Café, Linden Hills implicates the Creation story. In each, "in the beginning" is construed differently. Only in Mama Day is the woman able to "will" anything into existence, and this is revealed through naming, of course.

Opening Linden Hills is Grandma Tilson's mother wit. As a fitting closing, I will return to her words to her grandson on the changing definitions of self identity that occur over a lifetime and the necessity to remember the divine one that matters:

> Child, there's gonna come a time when you'll look at the world and not know what the blazes is going on. Somebody'll be calling you their father, their husband, their boss – whatever. And it can get confusing, trying to sort all that out, and you can lose yourself in other people's minds. You can forget what you really want and believe. So you keep that mirror and when it's crazy outside, you look inside and you'll always know exactly where you are and what you are. And you call that peace. (59)

Mama Day speaks of two Day girls named Peace who are lost, who die early in life. The novel's goal is to regain peace although two generations have lost it literally. In spite of the inability of the residents of Linden Hills to find peace, there is hope in Mama Day.

# CHAPTER 3

## NAME PEDIGREE AND ORAL HISTORY IN MAMA DAY

Names do have meaning.
Molefi Asante, The Book of African Names

A trestle between African and Western cultures, the names in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day equalize the two civilizations without compromising either of them. The close connections between the cultures presented in the novel are further evidenced in the marriage between Cocoa (Ophelia), the "last of the Days" who "brings back the [African] great, grand Mother," and George, a misnamed messiah who thrives on the scientific mandates of the Western world. One scholar describes the novel as "the story of the spirit of Africa that has traveled to the New World [. . .]. It affirms the staying power of the oral tradition" (Juhasz 156). In that Naylor pens the story and pulls from known Western literature like the Holy Bible and Shakespeare's The Tempest and Hamlet, the novel affirms the import of the written tradition as well. Sapphira, a Great Mother figure, sets the prominent naming sequence into motion when she births seven sons named for biblical prophets, the last of her sons given the Day surname. Sapphira's last son bestows upon his own septet names of New Testament apostles. The three generations of women that follow owe their names to Shakespeare as well as to a lacuna in the Day family that seeks spiritual restitution through the names Peace, Hope, and Grace. According to Molefi Asante in relation to African naming, "Each time parents name a child they are saying something about the way that they want that child to be, about who they see

themselves as, and about what the future of the African people should be" (9). The prophetic potency of Naylor's names conveyed through their African, Christian, and Feminist tenets reign in protest of Western hegemony. From the fringes of South Carolina and Georgia, the characters' intermittent connection to mainstream America (mainland) in the form of a tenuous bridge assuages the assumed power of Western thought just as the characters' names mediate the divide between Western and Afrofemtheological notions of existence.

Through Sapphira , the slave woman of "pure African stock" who inspirits Mama Day, Naylor reflects upon a time before European writing came to Africa and when the spoken word was considered a divine capsule of history. In fact, when Sapphira made her forced trek across the Atlantic, West Africa was still heavily utilizing the spoken word, especially names, as the conduit of knowledge and family record. Names of the Yoruba and other groups in West Africa evoked gods, ancestors, conditions and circumstances of birth, and even birth order. However, the intercontinental transplantation wrought by slavery precipitated a change in naming patterns for Sapphira's bloodline. F. Niyi Akinnaso's comments on Yoruba naming practices in "Yoruba Traditional Names and the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge" speak directly to Sapphira's adapted naming strategy:

> [. . .] it is precisely their potential for commonplace occurrence and frequent usage that makes personal names an appropriate medium for the storage, retrieval and transmission of cultural knowledge in a predominantly oral culture. When social and cultural values change, names and naming patterns often change accordingly [. . .]. Thus, names define sociocultural and psychological realities, and are in turn defined by these realities. (158)

The names of Sapphira's offspring are definitely evidence of the family's legacy of enslavement in Christian America. Nevertheless, in light of the intrusion of slavery, Sapphira neither insists on completely African names for her sons nor totally concedes to Western naming practices. Instead, she sets a naming pattern for her descendants that avoids a dichotomous view of Western (written) and African (oral) cultures. Robert Paustian, in his article, "The Evolution of Personal Naming Practices among American Blacks," comments:

> Black American names have seldom retained the overt phonetic manifestation of African names. But though Afro-American names do not often sound African, they definitely display the same themes and patterns as those popular in the West African region. (177)

Sapphira's insistence on maintaining balance is explained in the Willow Springs narrator's comment: "It ain't about right or wrong, truth or lies; it's about a slave woman who brought a whole new meaning to both them words [. . .] " (3). In naming her sons after Old Testament prophets, Sapphira manages to maintain the name as vessel of divine history while assuming the common naming strategies of her geographical location and historical time. Although the times reflected common biblical names, the first names of her sons in addition to the Day name signify on a spirituality that spans the Atlantic.

The Old Testament names of Sapphira's sons carry in them a bit of their "sociocultural and psychological" condition as Africans enslaved in America. According to Newbell Puckett's Black Names in America: Origins and Usage, giving biblical names to slaves was a common practice:

> It seems probable that the Biblical names of Blacks came more from the masters than from the slaves themselves. However, it is very possible that a Biblical name represented social as well as inspirational possibilities. There existed a long tradition in Africa of bestowing sacred names so that the recipient became familiar with the qualities and history of his name.

> [. . .] Perhaps this holds true in America; religious Blacks may have used Biblical names so that their children would be familiar with the teachings of Christianity. (48)

The names of Sapphira's sons might be owed to the slave master Bascome Wade except for the apparent intended and successful strategy of maintaining African naming constructs in the names. Alluding to the unique circumstance of naming slaves after prophets, Susan Juhasz, in "The Magic Circle: Fictions of the Good Mother in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day," comments on the names of Sapphira's sons:

> The first generation is named after figures in the Old Testament. It is interesting to note that, historically, once slaves became familiar with Bible narratives they preferred only certain names – names of leaders such as Moses, or names of kings such as David. Clearly the slaves saw a relationship between the name and the destiny of their offspring, for they never named a son Samson or a daughter Bathsheba. However, the names of the first generation of Day men are neither leaders nor kings, but prophets [. . .]. (140)

The names of Sapphira's sons read thusly: Elijah and Elisha, Joel, Daniel, Joshua, Amos, and Jonah Day. While generally, a statement can be made for such a selection translating the hope that the sons would prophesy the name of their god - in this case their mother goddess – the most striking among the names are those at the far poles of the queue, Elijah and Elisha, and Jonah Day.

For these children, Sapphira uses two dimensions of African naming – *amutorumnwa* names and day names. In Akinnaso's explanation of *amutorunwa* names, he speaks of the reasoning behind the names of Elijah and Elisha - patterned after Elijah, "one of the greatest of prophets" of the Old Testament, and Elisha, his successor (Sanford 288):

> When a child is born, say, inside an unbroken membrane or with the legs first rather than the head, the Yoruba do not believe that it is accidental. They regard such unusual birth circumstances as ritually significant,

> believing children born under such abnormal conditions to be specially created. (Akinnaso 142)

According to Akinnaso, children born under such conditions in Yoruba culture are given *amutorunwa* names. Two particular *amutorunwa* names indicate birth order in the same way that Elijah and Elisha do. According to Akinnnaso, "Taiwo" translates to "the first of twins or triplets" and "Kehinde" means "second of twins or triplets" (143).

While the names of the twins are interesting in their own right, the name that holds sway over all of the characters in the novel is the Day surname initiated upon the birth of Jonah, the seventh son who completes Sapphira's creation of a new world. A notation below the pedigree at the beginning of Mama Day states: "'God rested on the seventh day and so would she [Sapphira].' Hence, the family's last name" (1). Of course, Naylor's footnote is a signification upon the Christian God who rested on the last day of the world's creation, but more inconspicuous is the signification upon the day-naming practice so common in West Africa. Children named according to this practice have names that indicate their days of birth. For instance, the following male names of the Fante of Ghana display the day-naming pattern:

| | |
|---|---|
| Sisi | born on Sunday |
| Jojo | born on Monday |
| Ebo | born on Tuesday |
| Abeeku | born on Wednesday |
| Akua | born on Thursday |
| Fifi | born on Friday |
| Atu | born on Saturday |

(www.namesite.com)

Robert Paustian explains that a similar practice continued in the African Diaspora:

> One naming practice of African origin maintained in various parts of the Americas was that of giving day-names. Both in their original African form

> and in English translation, day-names continued in use. English translations of the day-names were also common in West Africa. (181)

Paustian continues:

> [. . .] [after emancipation] a number of people took on new family names, though only rarely those of their erstwhile owners. Most new Negro surnames were grounded in general American naming models imported from England. Those Blacks who had been living for some time as free men in the northern parts of North America, had adopted general American surnames copied from the people around them. Nevertheless, freshly emancipated Negroes showed individualism and imagination in their choice of given names. A great number of these new given-names were based, whether consciously or not, on naming themes from Africa. Distinctive given-names have remained popular among American blacks down to the present time. (Paustian 184)

Naylor's Sapphira maintains the aforementioned naming tenets in naming her sons; however, unlike Paustian's population that chose surnames after emancipation, Sapphira takes the daring leap of naming her progeny while the institution of slavery is still legal in the United States. Naylor distinctively positions Sapphira as a bridge between African and Western cultures. In this role, Sapphira is able to retain African modes of naming in day-naming while connecting them to Western naming practices that signify the names as divine.

Susan Juhasz claims that the notation "'God rested on the seventh day and so would she'" does not clarify much, but in such a statement Juhasz dismisses a major source of the African connection to which she alludes in her article (140). Sapphira uses a Western name that conjures images of divine creation - indicating that the Day line, like the seventh day, is divinely created. Also of important note is that none of her other sons have surnames - Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Daniel, Joshua, and Amos. Only Jonah has the last name of Day. The absence of last names is reinforced on the family tombstones. Dates of life spans are also absent. George comments on the unique tombstones, "The closeness of

all this awed me – people who could be this self-contained. Who had redefined time. No, totally disregarded it" (218). In his disbelief of the Day's defiance of "order," George quickly searches for an alternate reality to abate the predominance of the Day naming practice: "But it couldn't be the custom in the whole place. I remembered the tombstone at Chevy's Pass [. . .] Bascombe Wade's stone had been marked 1788-1823" (218). Like Willa in Linden Hills, George is a slave to Western name constructs. As mentioned in the Linden Hills chapter of this work, surnames are a relatively new phenomenon in history that began in Europe. Since this is the case, the Day family has not redefined anything. It has simply disregarded a Western system considered by George to be irrefutable and immutable. For George, Western epistemological systems are superior to all others.

In her act of naming, Sapphira maintains both theological and African remnants and at once makes a spectacular feminist statement. She functions as goddess in the naming process, creating her own prophets and days, thus creating her own world. In fact, Sapphira is "the Mother who began the Days," both literally and figuratively (263).

Additionally, the names of Sapphira's offspring convey a sense of the divine that is recognizable to those who are familiar with Christianity. Sharifa Zawawi offers the following in What's in a Name? Unaitwaje?: "[. . .] names convey, to those who know their origin and meaning, the social and cultural existence of the people who have created them" (1). Because Willow Springs residents are familiar with the origin and meaning of the names of Sapphira's sons, Sapphira's intent in defining her family in divine terms is evident. Overall, instead of making a propitiation to Christianity, the names of Sapphira's sons are actually more of a testament to her power as an African goddess.

Sapphira, bearing seven sons who are "free men 'cause their mama willed it so," is so powerful in her goddess status that "black folks, white folks, and even red folks [. . .] would only whisper the name Sapphira" (151). She is a goddess as noted by George's comments to Cocoa: "But it was odd again the way you said it - she was the great, great, grand, Mother - as if you were listing the attributes of a goddess" (219). Further testament to Sapphira's goddess nature is found in Candle Walk, the annual Willow Springs event held three days before Christmas in honor of the woman. Mama Day remembers:

> They'd all raise them candles, facing east, and say, 'Lead on with light, Great Mother. Lead on with light.' Say you'd hear talk then of a slave woman who came to Willow Springs, and when she left, she left in a ball of fire to journey back home east over the ocean. And Miranda says that her daddy, John-Paul, said that in his time Candle Walk was different still. Said people kinda worshipped his grandmother, a slave woman who took her freedom in 1823. Left behind seven sons and a dead master as she walked down the main road, candle held high to light her way to the east bluff over the ocean. (111)

Akinnaso's comments are helpful here.

> Because the Yoruba believe that the departed ancestors preside spiritually over their activities, it is not uncommon for a man in difficulty to seek help from his ancestors [. . .]. It is no wonder then that, like recognized divinities, ancestors are not only revered and venerated, but also worshipped. (151)

Mama Day also prays to Sapphira. When George is left with the task of saving Cocoa, Mama Day prays, "Whatever Your name is, help him" (299). Helen Levy, in "Lead on with Light," notes:

> Although Mama Day still believes in the male deity as the first creator, she imagines a powerful female partner. In Miranda's extremity, when Cocoa is threatened with death, she knows she must summon the Mother, [. . .] (281).

Levy proceeds:

> Arising out of a historical memory, a racial memory as well as a female memory, Sapphira's name comes only when Miranda passes through rationality, through male myth, coming at last through dreams to the first seer. (281)

After Sapphira's Old Testament prophets is a generation of New Testament apostles in the Day branch of the family tree. The transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament is an obvious movement toward a new day in the Day family as Missy Dehn Kubitschek corroborates in her "Toward a New Order: Shakespeare, Morrison, and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day:

> The clear movement from Old to New Testament not only invokes archetypal significance for the characters but announces the movement from one order to another before the traditional text of the novel even begins. That text explicitly invokes Shakespeare. (77)

While the text does invoke Shakespeare, it convokes Christendom, Africa and traditional Western values. The story is more than a revision of The Tempest's Miranda and Hamlet's Ophelia; the novel also summons Mama Day (Mother of Creation), George (Messiah without faith), and others. To mention the influence of Shakespeare without mentioning Naylor's other very obvious connections discredits the author's breadth of available resources. In order to demonstrate such linkages to the resources of Africa and the West, the ensuing sections of this chapter will examine the dominant characters individually - Mama Day, Ophelia (the second one), and George.

## Mama Day

I'm Mama Day to some, Miss Miranda to others. You decide what I'll be to you. (176)

The African component of Naylor's threefold naming strategy encapsulates Mama Day's naming pattern as the character changes names three times in her lifetime, indicating a similar West African naming practice:

> Conventionally a few West Africans change their names on different momentous occasions or in honor of some singular event. Africans can take many names besides birth-names in later life [. . .]. Events important to the family or tribe occasion the addition of extra names comparable to English nicknames. (Paustian 178)

Before she is Mama Day, she is Miranda, a name that follows the Shakespearean tradition of her mother's moniker, Ophelia. Specifically, "Miranda" calls up images of The Tempest's Miranda, Prospero's naive daughter. Conversely though, instead of a literatim depiction of Shakespeare's Miranda, Naylor's Miranda is all but a complete feminist revision who resembles Prospero more than his daughter. Futhermore, the narrator's comment in Mama Day that, "She's already lived longer than any Day before her," is clearly a play on "Day" as a correlative to the Judeo-Christian Jehovah (218). The "Day" part of "Mama Day" is also an allusion to Mama Day's eternality as the first narrator describes: "to show up in one century, make it all the way through the next, and have a toe inching over into the one approaching is about as close to eternity anybody can come" (6-7). Thus, her name translates to "Mother of Creation".

For most of the novel, the reader knows Miranda/Mama Day as a matriarch. The name change of Miranda to Little Mama denotes the assumption of the new responsibilities she undertakes upon her mother's bout with insanity and subsequent demise:

> [. . .] Just the bathing, clothing, and feeding of the woman who sat in the porch rocker twisting, twisting on pieces of thread [. . .] even Abigail called me Little Mama till she knew what it was to be one in her own right. Abigail's had three and I've had – Lord, can't count 'em – into the hundreds. *Everybody's mama now.* (89) [italics mine]

Only briefly functioning as Little Mama in her childhood, Miranda is elevated to "Mama Day," being "everybody's mama now" (89). Kubitschek contributes, "Miranda's

pet name, Mama Day, testifies to her superb nurturance of her sister, then her community, in day-to-day care, healing and mid-wifery" (85). However, Mama Day is more than a nurturer. The appellation acquired in her maturity translates to "Mother of Creation," the spiritual equivalent to "everybody's mama." Evidence of her power can be found in Bernice's faith in Mama Day to grant her the miracle of pregnancy and to rejuvenate her dead son after he succumbs to a vicious hurricane. Bernice, in essence, attributes non-human status to Mama Day during the procedure that ushers forth her pregnancy: "In the morning she can tell herself it was all a dream. And it can't be human hands no way, making her body feel like this" (140). Bernice believes in her with all of the blind faith normally attributable to a god or goddess. Mama Day is culpable in this complete devotion. She gives Bernice a package of seeds with the instructions that she should plant them under varying but specific circumstances. In doing this, Mama Day knows that Bernice hopes that this ritual will lead to her ultimate pregnancy. Mama Day discusses the seeds with Abigail: "'The mind is a funny thing, Abigail – and a powerful thing at that. Bernice is gonna believe they are what I tell her they are – magic seeds. And the only magic is that what she believes they are, they're gonna become'" (96).

As Mama Day ponders the upcoming "miracle" she is to perform in granting Bernice pregnancy, she reflects upon her father who told her that she "had a little more than others to give," but she questions "Who made her God?" (262). The following scene ensues as Mama Day admits her limitations:

> Miranda rocks and thinks of the things she can make grow. The joy she got from any kind of life. Can't nothing be wrong in bringing on life, knowing how to get under, around, and beside nature to give it a slight push. Most folks just don't know what can be done with a little will and their own hands. But she ain't never, Lord, she ain't never tried to get *over* nature. (262)

Mama Day concedes to a power higher than herself, but Bernice's faith in her to perform miracles is devout. When Bernice approaches Mama Day to call back the life of Little Caesar, Mama Day is unable to assist her since, by her own admission, "she ain't never tried to get *over* nature" (262).

In Mama Day, Gloria Naylor capitalizes on imagery reminiscent of the initial garden, the Garden of Eden. Thus, the reader is further convinced of Mama Day's divinity. Allusions to Mama Day as owner and creator of the garden abound:
"Nothing left to do but for Miranda to take a final walk amidst *her* garden" (242).
"Miranda shakes her head and takes a final look around *her* garden before she turns her face to the sky" (243)
"And *she had built* that garden back exactly the way it was [. . .]" (243). [italics mine]
Like God does in Genesis, Miranda walks amidst the garden that she created; however, the passages above reveal that there was an earlier divinity who used the garden. Sapphira was that first divine, for Mama Day realizes that it did not belong to her own mother (243).

According to Missy Kubitschek," the first historical appearance of the name "Miranda" was in Shakespeare's The Tempest (82). Therefore, Naylor's use of the name is an obvious signification on the Shakespearean character who shares a distinction with Naylor's Miranda in that she is estranged from her mother. However, aside from this modicum, Naylor's character signals Prospero and thereby indicates a feminist empowerment of Miranda. Peter Erickson verifies this connection in his article, "'Shakespeare's Black?': The Role of Shakespeare in Naylor's Novels":

> The force of Naylor's project is implied by the central character's double name: both Miranda and Mama Day. If the former suggests the tie to Shakespeare, the latter breaks it by indicating the possibility of escape from Shakespearean entrapment in the subservient daughter role. The age and experience of Naylor's Miranda not only contrasts with the youth and innocence of Shakespeare's Miranda; Mama Day's scope also encompasses and outdoes Prospero himself. (243)

Where Prospero is known as magician, Naylor's Miranda is known as nurturing healer. Even the magic that Prospero does exact is not of his own power. In holding Ariel captive, he is able to wield the actions of his Caribbean island while holding Caliban as a slave as well. Kubitschek comments:

> Prospero's magic lies outside the social world, its power morally suspect. He uses it to control Caliban with the crudest sorts of physical punishment, and though he eventually liberates Ariel, he must threaten in the meantime. Further, with Ariel as his stage manager, he directs the entire shipwreck and the subsequent wanderings of the courtiers. Thus, control is central to his use of magic – control of creatures, spirits, natural elements, and finally other human beings. (82-83)

On the contrary, Naylor's character uses her power to give life and hope, ultimately liberating Caliban in the process by retaining claim to the island of Willow Springs. Naylor's first narrator recalls an attempt made by people beyond the bridge to assume the island. In the account, the narrator recalls others on the South Carolina/Georgia coast who fell to the temptations of such real estate developers:

> You shoulda seen them coattails flapping back across The Sound with all their lies about 'community uplift' and 'better jobs.' 'Cause it weren't about no them now and us later – was them now and us never. Hadn't we seen it happen back in the '80s on St. Helena, Daufuskie, and St. John's? And before that in the '60s on Hilton Head? Got them folks' land, built fences around it first thing, and then brought in all the builders and high-paid managers from mainside – ain't nobody on them islands benefited. And the only dark faces you see now in them 'vacation paradises' is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass. On their own land, mind you, their own land. Weren't gonna happen in Willow Springs. 'Cause if Mama Day say no, everybody say no. (6)

African American writers have written repeated revisions of the Caliban story in exploring the effects of colonialism and its relationship to land appropriation, but none have been so explicit as Gloria Naylor in her feminist predilection. In her revision of Caliban, Naylor even positions Sapphira as an adumbration of Sycorax, recalling the famous line spoken by Caliban: "This island is mine by Sycorax my mother [. . .]" (Tempest I.ii. 331). Although those exact words are never spoken in Naylor's scenario, the words are implied in that Willow Springs denizens trace their land ownership to 1823 when Sapphira obtained the deed to the island from Bascombe Wade, the symbol of Western patriarchy in the novel. Mentioning a series of tales concerning how Sapphira came to own the land, the narrator resolves:

> Mixing it all together and keeping everything that done shifted down through the holes of time, you end up with the death of Bascombe Wade (there's his tombstone right out by Chevy's Pass), the deeds to our land (all marked back to the very year, [. . .]. (3)

However potent the power of the deed for the people of Willow Springs, certain written documents are not prioritized in the Day family. Paper might be able to define land ownership, but it is amiss in its ability to define actual people. Mama Day, especially, knows that the most accurate history can be found in the names of her family. It is her family tree that tells her that Peace was lost twice and *peace* at least once even earlier than the two Peace girls. Her family pedigree tells her of the Ophelia augury, and some of the other names reveal the divinity of her bloodline. So when Mama Day looks at Bascombe Wade's ledger that should contain names of his slaves including Sapphira's, Naylor writes, "The paper, itself, means nothing to Miranda. All Willow Springs knows that this woman was nobody's slave. But what was her name?" (280).

Some Naylor punditry suggests that Mama Day arranges the union between Cocoa and George through a method of African conjuring. If this is true, then Mama Day is in league with Prospero in that Prospero arranges the union of Miranda and Ferdinand. However, neither is he able nor does he try to promote life as Miranda does in the case of Bernice. Kubitschek remarks, "Unlike Prospero's magic, Miranda's work exists firmly within the natural context, speeding or slowing processes already there but not creating either processes or potential ex nihilo" (83).

Although Naylor's Miranda is a symbol of matriarchy in Mama Day comparable to Prospero as a symbol of patriarchy, she longs for the missing daughter/mother relationship that is also absent in The Tempest in the case of Miranda. As the novel wanes, Mama Day is finally called "Daughter" for the first time as she encounters the woman for whom she has been searching in her dreams:

> Daughter. The word comes to cradle what has gone past weariness. She can't really hear it 'cause she's got no ears, or call out 'cause she's got no mouth. There's only the sense of being. Daughter. Flooding through like fine streams of hot, liquid sugar to fill the spaces where there was never no arms to hold her up, no shoulders for her to lay her head down and cry on, no body to ever turn to for answers. Miranda. Sister. Little Mama. Mama Day, Melting, melting away under the sweet flood waters pouring down to lay bare a place she ain't known existed: Daughter. And she opens the mouth that ain't there to suckle at the full breasts, deep greedy swallows of a thickness like cream, seeping from the corners of her lips, spilling onto her chin. Full. Full and warm to rest between the mounds of softness, to feel the beating of a calm and steady heart. (283)

Levy writes, "As she [Miranda] sleeps, in dreams, Sapphira comes, nourishing Miranda, calling her 'daughter,' [. . .]" (281). In being called "Daughter," Mama Day assumes still another name. Called only "Miranda. Sister. Little Mama. Mama Day" for most of her life, "Daughter" is a welcomed moniker.

## Ophelia

> At least Abigail had the presence of mind to give Grace's baby a proper crib name. Miranda would have done it herself and had fixed it in her mind to crib name her. No – this was one girl they would not let get away. But it had to be the mama's mama, and Miranda was so afraid with the baby failing as she was, and Grace carrying on so after the daddy, drying up her milk with hate, that Abigail, nervous as she gets, would do it wrong. But that little ball of pale fire, spitting up practically every ounce of goat's milk she could finally take, pulling Mother's china knickknacks off the curiko before she could barely crawl, running before she could walk – she was *the* baby girl. They dropped the 'the' when they were sure she was gonna stay, and after Ophelia got to be five years old, she refused to answer to Baby Girl, think it meant just that. So they gave her the pet name Cocoa. 'It'll put color on her somewhere,' Miranda had said [. . .] (39).

Like Mama Day, Cocoa (Ophelia) goes through several name changes. Her first name is "Ophelia"; however, that name carries such a bad omen that Abigail and Mama Day try to counter it by assuming a practice similar to some West African societies that refrain from naming a child or simply name it "it" until the community is sure that the child will live: "[. . .] some societies wait for weeks before they name babies – the idea is to make sure that the baby will survive and, hopefully, perpetuate the name, as well as what it represents for him[her] and his[her] people" (Kiteme 82). Abigail names her, but Mama Day recalls the incident: "I was right proud of you, having the presence of mind to give her a fitting crib name – a name that helped to hold her here" (267). The narrator says that "she was *the* baby girl" and that "They dropped the 'the' [. . .]" (39). Even "Cocoa" is a better alternative to "Ophelia," at least for a while. Eventually, it too will carry the pathos of the earlier Ophelias. In Yoruba culture, *eya* names (names of venerated ancestors) are often given to the first born. However, "Ophelia" is a violation of *eya* naming; therefore, Cocoa is saved according to her West African-like phrase

name, "the child of Grace." Grace, of course, implicates Christianity in the history of Cocoa's name.

The interim name, "the baby girl," is definitely needed to counter the bad name "Ophelia" which is a violation of *eya* naming practices:

> [. . .] the Yoruba believe that departed ancestors have various ways of communicating with the living. One of the most cherished ways is for the soul of the departed ancestor to be reincarnated and born to one of his/her offsprings. This motivates a highly positive desire among the living offsprings to have their parents and grandparents reincarnated soon after their death. (Akinnaso 152)

Akinnaso quotes J. Omosade Awolalu:

> To qualify, such men and women must have lived well, attained an enviable old age before dying, must have left behind good children and good memory. Children and youths who die a premature death, barren women, and all who die a 'bad' death [. . .] are excluded from this respectable group. (154)

Akinnaso continues: "Thus, to die young and expect a rebirth is an anathema to eya belief system for it introduces discontinuity or lack of fulfillment to the established social order" (154).

Both "Baby Girl" and "Cocoa" are names that seek to debunk the tremendous power of "Ophelia" as a bad omen. In fact, Mama Day and Abigail are reticent about using Cocoa's birth name until she is an adult: "That's just it, Abigail – she aint' a baby. She's a grown woman and her real name is Ophelia. We don't like to think on it, but that's her *real* name. Not Baby Girl, not Cocoa – Ophelia" (116). Mama Day calls Cocoa "Ophelia":

> MD: Ophelia, I got me some gardening to do at the other place. Pick up them baskets.
> C: What did you call me?
> MD: Don't stand there with your mouth gaping open, I called you by your name.

C: But in my entire life, you've never used that name.
MD: That ain't true. The day you dropped into my hands, I first used it. Your mama said, 'Call her Ophelia.' And that's what we did. Called you that for a whole week to fix it into place. So you've heard me say it before, but you don't remember.
C: You mean, I can't remember. (150)

Mama Day and Abigail go to such great lengths to avoid the name "Ophelia" because of their own unhappy memories of the name. Cocoa recalls:

> Ophelia. What had Grandma said about her mother: an unhappy woman who never recovered from the loss of her youngest child? But Mama Day, in her no-nonsense fashion, had gone right to the bone: crazy as a bedbug and she died without peace. (224)

Cocoa's great-grandmother had committed suicide, thus disqualifying her name as one to be reassigned to any descendants according to eya naming practices. Mama Day recalls that the first Ophelia is never found after drowning herself in The Sound; however, Grace attempts to reincarnate the earlier Ophelia in order that her daughter might become the bane of a man's life thereby extinguishing any peace that he might enjoy: "[. . .] she wasn't to be found at all – until Grace brought her back with Ophelia. Unyielding, unforgiving Grace. That beautiful baby girl to live for, and she chose to wither away in hate" (278).

From the grave, Grace speaks on naming Ophelia: "If I had known then what I was knowing all along, I woulda named her something else. Sapphira. My grandmother only softly broke a heart. My great-great-grandmother tore one wide open" (151). Grace remarks that Cocoa should have reincarnated Sapphira which she actually does once she is able to regain peace for the Day family at the end of the novel, but first Cocoa must live out the name that she is given at birth. Mama Day thinks to herself: "[. . .] *the* Baby Girl brings back the great, grand Mother" (48).

When Naylor mentions *peace* in Mama Day, the allusion is two-fold. At once, she is signifying on the two Day children named Peace and the loss of emotional peace when they both die tragically. Naylor's first Ophelia, described as "another woman who could not find peace," is mentioned at the midpoint of the book (138). This Ophelia follows a legacy of lost peace. Before her, peace is lost by Sapphira when she is kidnapped from her native Africa to live as a slave in America. The Day family attempts to recapture peace in naming Sapphira's great-granddaughter Peace, but it is lost again when Peace drowns in a well. The first Ophelia is the mother of this lost Peace, and her neurotic search for her daughter leads to a literal disappearance of peace. As mentioned previously, Mama Day has to assume motherly duties in taking care of her sister Abigail because her mother has simply relinquished her role as caretaker. The next generation of Days sees another Peace in Abigail's daughter. She too succumbs to the fury of water as she dies in a hurricane. With the two deaths, Peace/peace is lost in the Day clan, and peace will be lost one more time before it can be recaptured by Cocoa. This time, the search and reclamation of peace will be connected to the name of the second Ophelia.

While Naylor's use of name ancestry within the Day family is rather potent in "Ophelia," her skill in name construction is ultimately assayed in the comparison she makes to Shakespeare's Ophelia. James Saunders offers commentary on the import of Naylor's naming strategy: "Naylor's ingenious use of the name 'Ophelia' and the action of death by drowning draw on Shakespeare and thereby add a certain power to the message of repeated loss" (261). Peter Erickson's comments are also helpful:

> Like Mama Day, Cocoa has a double name that operates to deny Shakespearean expectations. Cocoa is named Ophelia after her great grandmother, whose death by water recalls the destiny of Shakespeare's Ophelia in the male-dominated world of Hamlet. Cocoa's alternate name

> aids the process of exorcising the burden both of her great grandmother's demise and of the potential Shakespearean connotations. Mama Day's comment about tradition can be applied to the novel's general stance toward patriarchal political structures in Hamlet, King Lear, or The Tempest: 'Tradition is fine, but you gotta know when to stop being a fool.' (244)

Grace was foolish to name her daughter after her crazed grandmother. Although Mama Day and Abigail attempt to usurp the power of "Ophelia," eventually Cocoa must battle with the name's awesome omen. Strangely enough though, she is not plagued by the drowning of the first two Ophelias, Shakespeare's and Naylor's; "Cocoa" is at the center of her battle with insanity in spite of the fact that the temporary but traumatizing fight is induced by a murder attempt made by Ruby, a Willow Springs resident. Instead of putting "color" on Cocoa as Mama Day hopes, "Cocoa" encourages an insidious self-hatred that eventually almost overwhelms the "last of the Days."

Cocoa's color complex becomes clear to the reader during a discussion between Cocoa and George that quickly escalates into an unyielding breach. When Cocoa asks if her make-up is acceptable, George hesitantly rebuts: "Well, sweetheart, why do you always buy make-up that's too dark for you?"(231). During a conversational respite, Cocoa reflects on her childhood growing up in Willow Springs:

> It was awful growing up, looking the way I did, on an island of soft brown girls, or burnished ebony girls with their flashing teeth against that deep satin skin. [. . .] It would have been worse if I hadn't been a Day. Everyone respected my family name, and Mama Day let it be known that anyone calling me anything that she didn't call me would have to tangle with her. (232-233)

Gibed by other children for having "white blood," Cocoa first encounters trouble in her childhood (47). Wanting to have "red blood like everybody else," Cocoa develops an insecurity about her racial identity. George notices this:

> You were always very sensitive about your complexion, going out of your way to stress that you were a black woman if someone was about to mistake you for a Spaniard or Creole. . . you hated to think about the fact that you might also be carrying a bit of him [slave owner, Bascombe Wade]. [. . .] Even your shame was a privilege few of us had. We could only look at our skin tones and guess. At least you knew. (219)

It is George's remark about Cocoa's makeup that sends the couple into a full fray, vexing the same melanin demons inherent in the taunting of Cocoa's preadolescence. The oscillating diatribes result in the following riposte from George: "And you're the one painting yourself with tar? Don't you preach to me about values until you learn to accept what you are and wipe that crap off your face" (235).

Ostensibly in apology for her husband's flirtation toward Cocoa, Ruby braids Cocoa's hair only to taint the braids with the poison that will drive Cocoa almost to the brink of death. The poison causes Cocoa to have hallucinations about the skin on her face. This form of insanity is different from the drownings of her name-kin. The madness is specially suited for her - a woman who has faced a lifetime of discontent about her skin color. Cocoa first notices this facial deformity: "Bringing my fingers up to my cheek, I felt it intact and curved while the fingers in the mirror were probing a gross disfigurement" (275). This incident leads her to ask her grandmother if there is anything wrong with her face (276). The following scenario ensues:

> I didn't want to look at myself again, so I bent low under the bathroom mirror to wash the blush off my face. I dried it without looking as well. But feeling it fresh and whole, I thought I'd chance one more glance. I couldn't help myself – I screamed. My eyes, lips, chin, forehead, and ears

> had been smeared everywhere, mashed in and wrinkled, with some gouged places still holding the imprints from my fingers and the terrycloth. (276)

Cocoa makes the amazing observation that only her face is distorted in the mirror. The rest of her body is unaffected:

> But why wasn't I hallucinating now about my hands or legs or stomach? It was the same vision that took them in as well as the image in the mirror. I couldn't remember, and I wasn't going to test whether the rest of my body had also been distorted in those mirrors. (277)

Cocoa rises to a crucial point in determining her self-identity:

> I lay there staring at that mirror for a long time. When the moonlight had cut it in two with a jagged diagonal line, I quietly got up and removed the sheet. My heart was pounding, but I was more determined than afraid. Whatever I saw, I saw. And if it was a monster reflected back at me, I was still going to stand there and face it. (281)

She finally determines, "So the mirror was never to be trusted" (281). For years, Cocoa had looked to forces outside herself for validation. In her childhood, she used the other children of Willow Springs as the gauge of her true self, her true beauty.

The incident with the mirrors demonstrates to her that such exterior lenses cannot be trusted to reveal an accurate view of self-identity. In fact, Cocoa's struggle is more than a superficial one. She faces a battle that manifests itself both internally and externally: "[. . .] they were actually feeding on me, the putrid odor of decaying matter that I could taste on my tongue and smell with every breath I took" (287). She recalls: "The warm water felt good on my head and shoulders, even though I was so weak I had to kneel in the tub. Wherever the beaded spray touched me and ran down, the gnawing inside would quiet" (297). Cocoa's decay metastasizes from the inside outward.

She must find some other way besides mirrors to identify herself, and the source of identification must come from some place deeply embedded within. The beginning of

that process is in unlocking the keys to her names. Mama Day initiates her in this process earlier by introducing her to "Ophelia" and providing the first opportunity for her to hear the name histories of her ancestors in the graveyard. The final step for Cocoa is to redeem peace/Peace and to bring back "the great, great, grand Mother." Juhasz describes Mama Day as "'the beginning of the Days,' a story that includes a goddess who must be recovered – as Sapphira will be recovered by Cocoa" (156). Nothing short of divine intervention will cause this to happen, and Cocoa does achieve both goals but only with the intervention of her husband George, the misnamed messiah.

Cocoa is the literal "child of Grace" throughout the novel, but she has to be saved by George to fully realize the figurative implications of her phrase name. Repeatedly in the novel, Cocoa is referred to as "the child of Grace": "Three generations of nothing but girls, and only one left alive in this last generation to keep the Days going – the child of Grace" (39). After George's death, Mama Day notes: "So she's gotta get past the grieving for what she lost, to go on to the grieving for what was lost, before the child of Grace **lives up to her name**" [emphasis mine] (308).

Paustian's description of African phrase names resembles Cocoa's moniker, "child of Grace":

> Many of the names through West Africa evidence an interesting onomastic phenomenon in respect to the composition of phrases [. . .] under the rubric of phrase-name. They serve the dual purpose of both personal identification and the expression of attitudes, sentiments, and historical facts. (179)

Cocoa's phrase name reveals her genetic parentage, but the name also ties her to Christian tenets that rely on the grace that is provided by salvation. Romans 3:24 reads: "[We] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Ryrie Study Bible 1811). The evidence of George's messiahship will be discussed in more detailed later

in this paper. Nonetheless, the saving of Cocoa as she is on the verge of a horrible death does show that she is the recipient of the great spiritual gift of grace which, in the Christian world, is provided simply out of God's benevolence. It cannot be earned. As Cocoa grows older and comes to appreciate the intimate connection to her ancestors and to other loved ones both living and dead, she is able to live as "the child of Grace."

George

Is that your real name? (186)

George's culturally ignorant query of name legitimacy in Willow Springs is a direct result of his own personal misnomer as well as his training in the preeminence of Western ideas. When George declares, "[. . .] there must be some record ," after finding no written evidence of the Willow Springs founding matriarch, he fails to notice the staggering evidence of Sapphira's existence made apparent in Naylor's extensive naming trope. George insists on the kind of proof that Naylor positions in the beginning pages of the novel - a map, a pedigree, and a bill of sale – to qualify names and persons as real; notwithstanding, Naylor's use of names as "proof" of existence disaffirms the presumed priority of these documents. Helene Christol is of the opinion that "[. . .] Mama Day emphasizes the importance of the piece of paper, [. . .]" (Christol 160). However, quite the opposite, "The paper, itself, means nothing [. . .]" (Naylor, Mama Day 280). In spite of the low priority of written documentation in Willow Springs, George maintains an insistence on written proof that dates back to the lack thereof concerning his own identity.

Raised in the strictures of Western society at Wallace P. Andrews Shelter for Boys where he acquires the last name Andrews and is thereby dislodged from his Judeo-

Christian ancestry as the product of a virgin birth, George has nothing to indicate his true selfhood. Newbell Puckett comments that "[. . .] in both Hebrew and Babylonian thought, nothing existed unless it had a name. To eliminate the name was tantamount to eliminating the thing" (1). Furthermore, Zawawi adds: "A name constructs a person" (Zawawi 6). George finds that the name is, indeed, commensurate with existence and history as in the Yoruba and Hebrew traditions. He tells Cocoa: "You had more than a family, you had a history. And I didn't even have a real last name. I'm sure my father and mother lied to each other about even their first names. How would he know years later that I might especially wonder about his?" (129-30).

The publication of Mama Day (1988) predates Bailey's Café (1992); nonetheless, the reader of both works is able to recognize George as the child born at the conclusion of Bailey's among a group of biblical expatriates. Noticeable as a Christ figure in Bailey's Café, George fulfills his messianic role in Mama Day ("The Human Spirit" 257). Oddly though, in spite of his divine birth he is essentially an atheist - a messiah without faith. Unlike the biblical Jesus, George is unable to lean upon an extensive genealogy or a name like Emmanuel (God with Us).

George is led to faulty conclusions about his mother, believing that she was a fifteen-year old prostitute. This conclusion is drawn because he relies on the facts of his birth – born in a house reputed to be a brothel, found by a man who owned nearby Bailey's Café, turned over to the shelter at three months old, mother's body washed up on the nearby shore. In truth, his mother was a young Falasha Jew who had come to Bailey's Café as her last vestige of hope, the last stop before suicide. Since she was found dead on the shore, the young virgin presumably made that final step. In spite of George's

erroneous information regarding his family history, he does understand the importance of names. He intimates, "My mother was a whore. And that's why I don't like being called the son of a bitch. [. . .] I don't have all the pieces. But there are enough of them to lead me to believe that she was not a bitch" (130-31). Because George is unable to find his true name, he searches for some other way to validate his existence; thus, he is propelled by an erudite insistence on written documentation to satisfy all query.

George asks Dr. Buzzard, "Is that your real name?" (186). His question is really an inquiry of all of the names in Willow Springs - Dr. Buzzard, a self-proclaimed obeah doctor; Ambush, the husband of Cocoa's best friend; Windy Browne, an old soldier of the Negro Baseball League; and Parris, a World War II veteran named for his fighting post in France during World War II. His first interrogation of the Willow Springs naming motif occurs during his first conversation with Cocoa as he interviews his future wife for a job:

> George: So you picked up this nickname at your last job [. . .]?
> Cocoa: No. I've had it from a child – in the South it's called a pet name. My grandmother and great-aunt gave it to me [. . . ]
> George: That's fascinating. How do they decide on the pet name?
> Cocoa: They just try to figure out what fits.
> George: So a child with skin the color of buttered cream gets called Cocoa. I can see how that fits.
> Cocoa: It does if you understood my family and where I come from. (29)

Exactly because George does not know where he comes from, he finds difficulty in understanding the nuances of naming. During his time on Willow Springs, George learns to appreciate the dynamics of naming; however, he still fails to connect the names to their African and divine roots. In thinking of names for children, he tells Cocoa: "[. . .] if the first one's a girl, we'll call her Dawn. Let's do that with all our kids. Dawn, Midnight, Shower – Oops. It'll be an easy way to educate them about sex. Just explain

their names to them" (223) . Here, George is beginning to understand naming significance. George proceeds:

> There was an ancient bed on the second floor, a mahogany headboard ten feet high, and we could call the girl Mahogany – Mahogany Andrews. Let's bring ourselves into the house and erase a little of the sadness [. . .]. I felt we had something to give – maybe something we owed – to those other couples who tried but didn't make it. I was that sure about us; we could defy history. (226)

In expecting to defy history, George is asking for a bit much. As the house is reminiscent of the original garden, George is expecting to overcome the original fall of Adam and Eve, one of the couples who "tried but didn't make it." Additionally, George is being unrealistic in expecting that he can defy the more recent history of the house. He, too, eventually dies of a broken heart like the other men before him.

Only in death does George understand Cocoa's family and where she comes from. Cocoa's name erupts from an African center that is foreign to George. All of his life, George has lived on one side of "the bridge" with a one-sided view of naming and culture in general. Only after his journey across the bridge does he even begin to critically think about his Western training:

> [. . .] I thought of how I had lived beyond the bridge. I mean, all of my life.
>
> George Andrews. A smattering of applause as my name was called in the elementary school assembly – him? Yes, George Andrews with his government-issued shoes and ill-fitting shirt, the kid nobody wanted, as he came up the aisle, marching proudly to the beating of his own heart thundering long after all had stopped clapping, because that somber, reed-thin woman [Mrs. Jackson] sitting in the audience had taught him that it was the only music worth marching to. (291)

During his life "beyond the bridge," in a world where Western thought ruled, George was taught "Only the present has potential [. . .]" (26). He is unaccustomed to a culture that suggests divergent ways of seeing.

Mrs. Jackson instilled in George and the rest of the boys at the shelter a religious commitment to fact, so much so that George is a slave to fact – an attribute that is explained in the following passage:

> When I left Wallace P. Andrews I had what I could see: my head and my two hands, [. . .]. I may have knocked my head against the walls, figuring out how to buy food, supplies, and books, but I never knocked on wood. No rabbit's foot, no crucifixes – not even a lottery ticket. I couldn't afford the dollar or the dreams while I was working my way through Columbia. So until you [Ophelia] walked into my office, everything I was – all the odds I had beat – was owed to my living fully in the now. How was I to reconcile the *fact* of seeing you the second time that day with the *feeling* I had had the first time? Not the feeling I told myself I had, but the one I really had.
>
> You see, there was no way for me to deny that you were there in front of me and I couldn't deny any longer that I knew it would happen – you would be in my future [. . .]. I must have looked as if someone had stuck a knife into my gut, because that's the way it felt. (27-28)

The meetings between Cocoa and George, a first one in a diner and the second in George's office during an interview, challenge everything that George believes about the lack of possibilities inherent in chance. Therefore, the second meeting with Cocoa disturbs George's very foundation of belief in himself.

However, after George "crosses over" to Willow Springs, his divinity begins to reveal itself through dreams and finally in his actions. During a dream, he sees Mama Day leaning over the bridge, a suggestion that Mama Day has successfully negotiated the divide between Western and African cultures (183). She is there to coax George toward the same success. George remembers:

> Her voice came like thunder: No, Get Up and Walk. She's a crazy old woman, I thought as I kept swimming harder toward the receding shore. A wave of despair went over me as I began sinking . . Get Up and Walk [. . .]. And I found myself standing up in the middle of The Sound. (183-84)

This is the first indication of George operating in his messiah role. In an interview with Michelle Felton, Gloria Naylor reveals that "[. . .] George saves Cocoa, and in that way he saves the whole line of Days, all the women" ("The Human Spirit" 257). However, it must be remembered that the aforementioned episode is still only a dream, an allusion of what is to come. George still does not realize his divine connection. His atheistic beliefs prohibit him from receiving the prophecy delivered in his dream. When Cocoa is suffering through her battle for life, George ponders prayer:

> I might take a deep breath and say, God help me, really meaning, Let the best in me help me. There wasn't a moment when I actually believed those appeals were going beyond me to a force that would first hear, secondly care, and thirdly bend down to insert influence on the matter. (251)

In acknowledging that she must solicit George's help to save Cocoa and thus the line of the Days, Mama Day thinks, "The Days were all rooted to the other place, but that boy had his own place within him. And she sees there's a way he could do it alone, he has the will deep inside to bring Baby Girl peace all by himself [. . .]" (285). Even Dr. Buzzard gives George a lesson in faith:

> George: We're going to be fine because I believe in myself.
>
> Dr. Buzzard: That's where folks start, boy – not where they finish up. Yes, I said boy. 'Cause a man would have grown enough to know that really believing in himself means that he ain't gotta be afraid to admit there's some things he just can't do alone. (293)

As the novel approaches its denouement, George's role as messiah becomes clearer. The narrator mentions the balm of Gilead as George approaches Miranda: "Balm

of Gilead is best [. . .]. Her hands waxy and slick from the balm of Gilead, Miranda leans back in the rocker with them folded on her lap" (293). The narrator continues: "When she holds 'em out to him they're trembling, the fingers gnarled and coated with flecks of balm" (294). In this passage, Naylor alludes to Jeremiah 8:22, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (King James). Jeremiah 8:22 speaks in reference to the people of Israel who were as close to God's help as to a healing balm just a day's journey away. In the act of rubbing her hands with balm, Mama Day asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter [Cocoa]of my people recovered?". Jesus is often considered the "Balm of Gilead". In like vein, George is the actual balm that has the power to cure Cocoa. In his mission to save Cocoa, George has a heart attack while he is attacked by the chickens in Mama Day's chicken coop. He bleeds as he makes his way across the road to Cocoa. Finally, he lives up to his role as messiah: "As my bleeding hand slid gently down your arm, there was total peace" (302). In George's death, peace is restored to the Day family – the peace that was lost on the departure of Sapphira and that was lost after the deaths of Peace and then Peace again. In shedding his blood, he delivers salvation to the Day family as Jesus Christ delivers peace to the whole world.

In Swahili culture in East Africa:

> [. . .] some children lose their original names when they are brought up or adopted by others [. . .]. Since a name is of great significance to a person, an individual who is deprived of his original name in this way when he is young, often reclaims it when he grows up. (Zawawi 14)

Although George does not carry the power of his birth conditions during his life, he realizes it in his death, and he is resurrected as his spirit lives on Willow Springs to recant with Cocoa the mistakes made during their marriage.

The names are, indeed, a bridge between African and Western cultures. Like the bridge between Willow Springs and the mainland that breaks down every few years or so and is rebuilt at an unrushed pace, the philosophical bridges between African and Western cultures find their meeting point through constructs such as names. The marriage between Cocoa and George is the best representation of Western and African values working together. Because Cocoa and George continue to disagree about their story even after George's death, Western and African cultures might never agree on the same. However, through the names, Naylor demonstrates the parity of Western and African cultures.

## CHAPTER 4

## . . . MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM: NAMES ANDROGYNIZING BAILEY'S CAFE

Bailey's Café, the final addition to Gloria Naylor's quartet, echoes a mission of the previous novels - to properly register women among the world's many narratives, from Creation and beyond. Amid the stories in Naylor's fourth novel, Jesse Bell, the reincarnation of the biblical Jezebel, proclaims: "[. . .] it's all about who's in charge of keeping the records" (118). Women in Linden Hills recorded their existence where they could - in recipes, in gardens, and in scripture where one Nedeed wife tried to write herself into holy writ where there was no pre-existing place for her. As a slave, Mama Day's Sapphira certainly was not in charge of keeping the records – bill of sale, deed, etc.; nevertheless, she managed to coax the deed from her slave master and pass on the prized document to her descendants plus the sacred record in the naming strategies that she brought with her from Africa. Again, in her fourth novel, Bailey's Café, Naylor challenges the keeper of the records by castigating the long-venerated Judeo-Christian tradition, boldly revising scripture that has historically pinioned women to the limited roles of their biblical cohorts. In this veritable *Gospel According to Gloria Naylor*, the author keeps a record quite different from the original Bible. Instead of the diametric and stringent gender positions depicted in scripture, gender roles in Bailey's Café form a symmetry even to the point of androgyny, showing that humanity is not a capsule of

priapic power after all. As Naylor presents her tale, humanity is a balance of genders mirroring what feminist theologians consider to be the human ideal - being neither male nor female.

In a 1985 conversation with Toni Morrison, Naylor discussed her frustration with the reality that authority usually rests in the hands of men. She looks forward to a time when she can say, "Well, I am the authority [. . .]. What I guess I really want to do is be a man; that would make it easy" (575). Toni Morrison rebuts with what becomes one of the themes for Naylor's 1992 novel: "It wouldn't be easier if you were a man, but what would be easier is if you had all the rights and the authority that are male and the adventure, what we equate with adventure, that is male" (575). Naylor, believing that the "whole sense of adventure and authority tied to maleness has a lot to do with how books are created and who's creating them" and who keeps the record, creates her own chronology in Bailey's Café.

In this work, absent are the strong African name constructions present in Mama Day, but more prevalent are characters named for Old Testament women like Eve, Esther, and Jezebel. The New Testament Madonna is even implicated in Mariam, and Mary reminds the reader of Mary Magdalene, also of New Testament memory. Naylor's Bailey's Café is laden with key names and allusions to the patriarchal system induced and/or supported by the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, in this novel, Naylor also indicts a repressive matriarchy in which communities of women are also complicit in other women's oppression. In a personal interview, the author intimated the driving forces of the novel as the suppression of "female sexuality" in addition to the

"whore/Madonna matrix." In this "matrix," anyone who does not fit tightly within the category of Madonna is equated to the "whore."

In naming Eve and most of her tenants after biblical women, Naylor is naming the strict categorization that has long charged women throughout history with the "crimes" of the original name holders and expected the unrealistic that it required of the first name carriers as well. Thus, these names have attached to them unreasonable expectations that ultimately lead the women to downfall when others (society) notice that they have not lived according to their names.

The imperfection of both patriarchy and matriarchy account for Naylor's move toward androgyny especially in Miss Maple who is the last major character to tell his story. Furthermore, the christ-child that is born at the end of the novel offers hope that the next millenium will yield liberation in sexuality that does not confine gender roles. As the characters in Bailey's Café realize their sexual selves, they are positioned in a strangely liberating limbo. Only in another world can a cross-gender arrangement be made that accepts the sexuality of everyone.

As Bailey's Café unfolds, the narrative makes its way across a world of women's stories, stories surviving in a penumbral collective that includes Bailey's Café, Gabe's Pawn Shop, and Eve's bordello/boardinghouse. The plot of Bailey's Café is guided by the proprietor of Bailey's Café who buys the place after his return from World War II. The café, "some space, some place, to take a breather for a while," serves as the axis of the novel's events where people facing the consequences of reaching life's nadir either step into the void in the back of the café to commit suicide or stay to become whole before daring to face the world again.

A cast of interesting characters streams through Bailey's Cafe. The first customer is Eve who arrives at the café after being evicted from her home in Pilottown by her guardian, Godfather. Located down the block from Bailey's Cafe, Eve's brownstone is a refuge for single women with the exception of "Miss Maple," a man who loosens the boundaries of gender for he is as comfortable in a dress as he is in his manhood. Entering Bailey's Café on her way to Eve's is Esther, who comes to Eve's after twelve years of sexual and emotional torture. Jesse Bell arrives at the brownstone with a heroin addiction and the embarrassment of a failed marriage and a much-publicized lesbian relationship. Mary is the ultimate conundrum in the novel. In protest to the name expectations that she is unable to meet, she chooses self-mutilation. Mary is expected to be the biblical virgin, but is more akin to the prostitute, Mary Magdalene. Although Eve's place is full of aberrant personalities, Mariam can be categorized as "phenomenal" - a fourteen-year-old mentally challenged Falasha Jew who arrives at Eve's pregnant though a virgin saying, "No man has ever touched me" (143).

Gloria Naylor's onomastic expanse of the Bible is a herstorical roll call of the women who have shaped historical attitudes toward women, from the "first sinner" to the "immaculate" one. Nonetheless, after the stories of those women, comes a character that is never directly named in the Bible; however, according to feminist theology, Miss Maple would be the fulfillment of the divine plan of Genesis that made for a perfectly balanced humanity in the androgyne. The point on which the feminist argument rests is Genesis 1:27 as Moses records "[. . .] male and female he created them." Susan Niditch, a theologian, comments on this early statement in creation:

> Without establishing relative rank or worth of genders, the spinning of this creation tale indicates that humankind is found in two varieties, the male

> and the female, a reflection of the deity. For feminist readers of scriptures, no more interesting and telegraphic comment exists on the nature of being human and on the nature of God. The male aspect and the female aspect implicitly are part of the first human and a reflection of the Creator. (12)

## Eve

Along these lines of androgyny, Naylor develops Eve first then finally Miss Maple. Eve walks into Bailey's Café as both Eve and Adam although only her "Eve-ness" is named. In such a portrayal, Naylor echoes the biblical scenario where both are expelled from the garden, both eat the forbidden fruit, but Eve receives the world's retribution. As is the original "Eve", Naylor's character of the same name is "mother of all living," but she is also Adam as "groundling." In the chapter "Eve's Song," Eve is first "groundling" (the Hebrew translation of Adam) then "mother of all living" (Korsak 48). Adam is "from the dust", and in like manner, Naylor's Eve is of "the delta dust" (Niditch 13) (Naylor 90). Eve believes that "the delta dust exists to grow things, anything, [. . .]" (Naylor 90). Included in the possible outgrowths of the delta dust is Eve herself as she literally germinates from a patch of ragweed (Naylor 83). Just as the biblical Adam is formed before his helpmeet Eve, the "Adam self" ("groundling") of Naylor's Eve is developed before the "mother of all living" component of the character. She is prepared to fulfill her "Eve-ness" when she emerges from New Orleans with a "love of well-kept gardens" (91). An obvious allusion to the Garden of Eden, the garden that surrounds Eve's brownstone signifies the property as a sanctuary for the people who come there in search of wholeness since it is like the Garden of Eden which, in biblical eschatology, is considered "a separate place, a sanctuary quite unlike the rest of the world" (Dumbrell 25). It is in the sanctuary that Eve fulfills her role as "mother of all living" by accepting the women who first go to Bailey's Café. Bailey directs them to

Eve's: "Go out the door, make a right, and when you see the garden – if you see the garden – you're there" (81).

It is Eve's "Adam-ness" that Godfather attempts to eradicate by giving Eve baths. Godfather washes Eve to the extreme of " – a deep scowl as he wrapped the rough washcloth around his pinkie finger to unearth any hidden speck of grime" (84). In the bathing is a baptism in which Godfather hopes, as Christian dogma does of its baptized, that Eve is no longer "in Adam" (Ryrie Study Bible 1550). In addition, if Eve's dust or dirt can be attributed to the part of her that is Adam, then the baths given by Godfather are a method of ridding Eve of her male component. Furthermore, theologian Carolyn Osiek states that "the division of the original human being into two genders was the beginning of the internal division of the person into rationality (symbolized by the male principle) and sensation (symbolized by the female principle)" (335). Therefore, if Adam constitutes the rationality that Osiek claims, Godfather attempts to eliminate from Eve the judgmental ability that informs her that the soap that was "scrubbed in descending circles" causing her skin to tingle is actually evidence of his sin (84).

Eve enters the first stages of her "Eve-ness" while playing a game of hide-and-seek with her playmate, Billy Boy. He is an Adam figure who bears a remarkable likeness to Mary Daly's description of the biblical Adam as a "servile and arrogant dunce" (46). Billy Boy has kept his "baby's brain" and offers no resistance when Eve orders him to stomp while she is pressed under a juniper bush (Naylor 86). Eve relates one of their games of hide-and-seek:

> [. . .] the vibrations of Billy Boy stumbling and crashing through the low bushes as he came closer. So close: the vibrations: the pounding of my heart: the quickness of my hot breath against my arm. And underneath it all – through it all – just a tremor [. . .]. But the tremors stop as he

> [Godfather] stands still in the clearing to begin searching for us. And the loss of that sensation hits me in the middle, a dull, aching pain. (86)

Eve's "loss of . . . sensation" leads her into the development of her female principle. However, this revelation of female principle or sexual self is criticized by the patriarchy represented by Godfather. Amy Benson Brown, in her article, "Writing Home: The Bible and Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Cafe," remarks on this important event in Eve's story: "Naylor's recasting of Eve's crime as masturbation reveals the common conflation of sin with sexuality and decriminalizes this original 'sin' as the innocent, sexual self-exploration of a lonely adolescent" (25).

So for Naylor, Eve's heightened sense of her own sexuality is not a sin, but a natural evolution in the development of an adolescent. In this section of the novel, Godfather and the Judeo-Christian tradition are synonymous, functioning much like the "straitjacket" of religion that Naylor used to restrict her own "budding sexuality" and view of "the various shadings of life" (Mabunda, vol. 10). Eve's punishment, being thrown out of Godfather's house and the church, is equal to the exile of the biblical Eve after the Fall of Man. Naylor's Eve reveals the magnitude of the church's ostracism, "To be thrown out his church was to be thrown out of the world" (85). Mary Daly's comments also echo the great impact of the "original sin": "Reflection upon its [the Fall's] specific content and the cultural residues of this content leads to the conviction that, partially through this instrument, the Judeo-Christian tradition has been aiding and abetting the sicknesses of society" (47).

As Eve's feminine self begins to develop, her masculine side continues in its evolution as well. To be of dirt or "in Adam" is equivalent to being "in sin," thus cause

for trying to wash off the clinging dirt. Nonetheless, Eve comes to a resolution with her Adam-ness and claims it as valid and acceptable. She contemplates her constitution:

> A thousand years ago and I can't wash it off; I still find a few grains of it in the bottom of the tub after I've pulled the stopper. I don't know why I keep thinking I can; it's no more possible than washing away my fingerprints or my color. I guess because it's only dirt, and there's something that makes you believe you can wash away dirt. But it's not a part of me – it is me. (82)

Eve further comments on the delta dust and how it has, essentially, consumed her: "And the delta dust exists to grow things, anything, in soil so fertile its tomatoes, beans, and cotton are obscene in their richness [. . .] it finally stilled my menstrual blood" (90).

When her menstrual flow is stopped by the dirt, Eve officially becomes an androgyne. She is genderless and says so herself: "I had no choice but to walk into New Orleans neither male nor female – mud" (91). She is still "mud" when she leaves New Orleans for the marginal space down the street from Bailey's Café. She has found a place for her "dirt" to be the foundation of beauty in her "well-kept gardens." Bailey remembers his wife's knowledge of the flowers: "It's Nadine who knows all their names, and she clued me in to something else about that wall: 'They're all wildflowers'" (92). The wildflowers are for the anomalous women who seek Eve's boardinghouse for refuge and lilies (Day lilies, Tiger lilies, Madonna lilies, Canna lilies, Calla lilies, *Lilies of the valley*) for the salvation available at the center of Eve's sanctuary. Bailey continues to ponder Eve: "She's got some kind of plan to all of this. As you move in toward the center of that yard, where that large tree stump sits, spring, summer, or fall you're gonna find circles and circles of lilies" (92). The lilies are patent allusions to Jesus Christ who is often called the Lily of the Valley. Even moreso, the lilies stand for the salvation and wholeness that Jesus Christ represents.

Esther
My brother knew. My brother knew. (99)

At her brownstone, Eve makes room for Esther but does not allow anyone else to live in the brownstone who harbors her brand of hatred. Eve says, "That kind of woman hated men. And there was no more room available for that kind in my boardinghouse. Esther was enough" (82). Esther arrives at Eve's place after she has fulfilled her twelve years of concubinage to a landowner. She endures the abuse as repayment of a debt to her brother who cares for her until she is twelve. When Esther gets to Eve's, she is full of hatred, both for herself and men. The words that begin Esther's account of her twelve years of torture exemplify how deep-seeded her self-deprication:

> I like the white roses because they show up in the dark.
> I don't.
> The black gal. Monkey face. Tar. Coal. Ugly. Soot. Unspeakable.
> Pitch. Coal. Ugly. Soot. Unspeakable. (95)

Esther is accustomed to being "hidden" or a "secret" as the literal meaning of her name indicates (Hitchcock, screen 1). Just as she is cloaked in darkness, so has her story been hidden for thousands of years, her story of abuse that is also the story of so many others. Naylor fashions Esther out of the traditional story of the Bible's Queen Esther who saves the Jews from certain execution although Naylor's Esther is no queen and certainly no savior of her people. More sordid in its details, Esther's story clearly recalls that of Queen Esther in the Old Testament. To demonstrate this connection, Esther 2:2-4 reads:

> Let a search be made for beautiful *young* virgins for the King [. . .]. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the King's eunuch who is in charge of women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the girl who pleases the King be given instead of Vashti. (Ryrie 666) [italics mine]

Like Queen Esther, Naylor's Esther replaces a young girl who disobeys the man to which she is obligated. Queen Vashti's banishment ensues after her refusal to appear naked before the King and other party attendants. Assuming the girl whom Esther replaces to be Vashti or one or remarkable similitude, her experience was probably similar. Also, not only does Esther's "hag" bear phonetic resemblance to King Xerxes' Hegai, but Esther's "hag" assumes the same role as the eunuch. The hag gives Esther beauty treatments: "It is the hag who comes to wake me the next morning. She pours water into the china basin and washes me with soap" (96). Naylor provides a stronger connection to the eunuch when Esther confesses, "I have never seen a woman with a beard" (96). The hag has long gray hairs on her chin. Once Queen Esther is brought to the King, Esther 2:9 reads: "Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food [. . .] and moved her [. . .] into the best place in the harem." One of Esther's first observations after she moves in with the man is that "there is much more food" at the man's house than at her brother's house (95). Then Esther is given accommodations which she compares to those of royalty: "[. . .] a whole bedroom to myself [. . .]. Only a princess would have a bed like this. Deep pink and trimmed with lace" (96).

She is first manipulated by a feeling of obligation to her brother who is, in turn, obligated as a tenant farmer to Esther's abuser. In living with the man, Esther believes that she has to stay for twelve years to account for each year that her brother cares for her. She says at the beginning of the story, "'This is your husband,' my brother said [. . .] Even at twelve years old I doubt, but I believe in my older brother" (95). Esther has been so conditioned to be dependent upon the male gender for her livelihood that she fears rejection from her "husband" even at the high cost of her emotional well-being:

> I do not want to be like her. I do not want to be sent away. So I will not tell anyone what happens in the cellar. The whispers: spiders scratch and spin in the dark. The bitch lies about him all over the county. To the minister. To the sheriff. To his own field hands. The bitch wasn't woman enough to have his children and so she lies about him out of spite. For revenge. Lies that he is not a man. Lies that he wanted more than was his due when he called her. I do not want to be sent away. So I come down when he calls. (96)

Esther's most severe abuse suffered while at her "husband's" house is the sexual abuse. She recalls its detail in her chapter:

> My hands reach in the wooden chest and feel the shapes of the leather-and-metal things. No jumping ropes. No rubber balls. The edges of the metal things are small and sharp. The leather things coil around my fingers like snakes. They are greasy and smell funny. No, they are not toys [. . .] And I will learn that in the dark, words have a different meaning. Having fun. Playing games. Being a good girl. (97)

The choice of the name "Esther" is most apropos considering the patriarchal evils that have remained covered by the records that have come down through history. Instead of stories of child abuse including sexual torture, followers of the Judeo-Christian tradition have received tales of women-girls like Queen Esther who have sacrificed their very lives for their people. Actually, readers of the Bible never receive Queen Esther's side of the story. Even Naylor's Esther decides to keep her story a secret:

> I thought about killing this man when I was within hours of becoming the next lying bitch to leave. I thought about sparing the other young girls waiting in line to sleep alone in his pink-and-lace bed. The other twelve-year-olds with brothers. But my guess turned out to be right. There are too many of them to kill. And there are just too many twelve-year-olds. (99)

The above quote indicates that Esther knows that she will not be the last "Esther," and unlike Queen Esther, she is not willing to sacrifice her self for the never-relenting evil that is before her. Amy Benson Brown contributes:

> In sum, the unspeakability of Esther's abuse evokes the unspeakability of the sexual violations of enslaved women and the legacy of slavery on constructions of African American women's sexuality. In the stories immediately following Esther's, Naylor articulates another repressed aspect of representations of sexuality, the construction of the virgin/whore dichotomy. In "Mary: (Take One)," the name 'Mary' signifies both the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. By collapsing these two into one character, Naylor's hermeneutic of suspicion here reveals how the identities of 'virgin' and 'whore,' though often understood as essences, are socially constructed and mutually defining. (26)

Mary (Take One)

You have to believe what you see in the mirror, don't you? Isn't that what mirrors are for*?* (104)

Like Cocoa in Mama Day and most of the women in Linden Hills, Mary suffers internally because of the distorted images reflected back at her from mirrors and the eyes of others. In Mary's case, the mirrors reflect an unreachable combination of the virgin/whore that she is never able to fulfill:

> Every mirror outside had told me what she was: the brown mirrors, hazel mirrors, blue mirrors, oval, round, and lashed mirrors of all their eyes when they looked at me. Old eyes, young eyes, it didn't make any difference if the mirrors belonged to men: I saw her standing there unclothed with the whispered talk among my brothers, their smudged laughter about the sofa down the block on which they were always welcome. But there was a difference when it came to the women: the young and unmarried reflected her with an envy so intense it bordered on hate; those older and married, with a helpless fear. Yes, they all looked at me and knew, just knew, what she was. You have to believe what you see in the mirror, don't you? Isn't that what mirrors are for? (104)

As Cocoa has her husband and Christ figure, George, to save her from the destructive, external images, Mary has no one quite benevolent enough to rescue her permanently: "Any teacher. Any janitor. Any deacon. Any porter. Any storekeeper. Any race, any age, any size - any son of any man - had the power to drive away that demon from the mirror. Over and over, they became my saviors from *her*" (105). Also, like Cocoa, Mary

finds something in the reflection that does not quite match her image of her true self. Mary calls that evasive something or someone "demon." The chapter, "Mary (Take One)," reveals a divided woman who is bifurcated between the Virgin Mary her father wants her to be and the Mary Magdalene figure whom she sees in the mirror, a woman plagued by demons.

Gloria Naylor plays on the connection to Mary Magdalene, a woman who was loosed of seven demons by Jesus Christ. Although scripture does not state exactly, Mary Magdalene has been tagged throughout the ages as a prostitute. Naylor's Mary does not engage in sex for money; however, she does pursue a seemingly insatiable sexual appetite and fulfills it with innumerable men. Underlying Mary's journey from the pristine "Peaches," the name her father calls her, to the town's picture of promiscuity is her name. Mary remembers: "It was Daddy Jim who started calling me Peaches. Plump and sweet. Yellow and sweet. Daddy's baby. Daddy's beautiful baby" (102). The name "Peaches" calls up an innocent image that suggests to her father the Virgin Mary that Naylor's character tries to be:

> I brought in straight A's at the academy. I worked part-time at the druggist's. I joined the Girl Guides. I joined the Missionary Circle. I rolled bandages for the resistance in Spain. I sang for the glee club. Sang for the war relief – sang in the church choir. But she was always there, reflected in the wetness of men's eyes [. . .]. I wore high-necked shirtwaists and loose skirts, thick woolen tights, even in the summertime, that scratched and left welts on my legs. But I could feel their eyes stripping my clothes away [. . .]. (105)

Under pressure to live up to the Virgin Mary, Naylor's Mary rebels thereby living the literal definition of the name – rebellion. Mary's role as whore is most evident in the following passage in which she meets her last beau:

> Any regular at Piney Brown's knew there was always room at my table. And they also knew that I didn't drink or smoke. So his second and third questions told me right away he was a stranger in town. But it was the fourth question that put him into my life: Before we even get started, tell me your real name. (108)

She elaborates:

> I was to hear it whispered as he dressed me for bed each night. Mary. [. . .] With each button of my blouse. Mary. [. . .] The metal hooks in my brassiere, one by one: Mary. [. . .] And he never called me anything but Mary. Never. Not even when Kansas City had to become Saint Louis, and Saint Louis had to become Chicago, and Chicago had to become South Bend, and South Bend – Cincinnati. He made the same mistake Daddy Jim had. One thought a wall would be the answer; another thought distance. Still he never called me anything but Mary. (109)

Still under the pressure of living the expectation of the Virgin, Mary cracks.

> The police thought he had done it. But since I refused to change my story, there was nothing they could do and they had to release him from jail. No one believed that a woman would do that to herself. No one believed that his grief wasn't guilt. But his grief over what he'd lost was very real. First, I took the tip of the beer opener, smiled into the mirror, and traced the path I was going to take: under the right cheekbone – yes, it must be the right – then a straight diagonal across the dimple, all the way over to the left side of the chin. A thin red line was left on my skin for me to follow, so I didn't need to smile again as I grasped the opener in both hands and dug down. But I wasn't prepared for the first bolt of blinding pain; it took precious seconds to catch my breath. And now the opener hanging in my ripped cheek was too slippery to hold firmly because of the gushing blood. I made a poor job of it. I had to resort to sawing my way down, leaving hunks of flesh wedged between the two prongs of the opener. That took so much time that when I'd only reached the bottom jawbone, the pain was so intense I passed out. I awoke to him wailing my name and the ambulance wailing out in the street. And after the sirens had died down, my name kept echoing over and over. It was the only word that man could bring himself to say in my presence again. (111)

Mary travels to Eve's place to find her true self. At Bailey's Café, she is not "Peaches," her father's dream child. Bailey recounts a visit from Mary's father: "He's come in here looking for his daughter. But no one knows her by that name [. . .]. If he comes over here to the counter, I'll tell him that no one knows her by that name" (100).

He continues: "And his daughter lives at Eve's now, where no man calls her by that name" (102).

At Eve's boardinghouse, Mary takes the time to find out who she really is. Regardless of her sordid past, Mary is taught that she is worthy of honor simply for who she is instead of who she is expected to be:

> The autumn wind is chill outside and the fragile heads of the daffodils wilt easily in the heat of the parlor. And if they go upstairs with a bouquet that's less than perfect, Eve's taught her to send them back down again. Look in that mirror good, and accept no less than what you deserve. The longer the line, the longer the wait; the later the season, the warmer the house. And it's the same fifty dollars for a fresh bouquet. (113)

Eve tells Mary's father when he comes in search of Peaches: "-Go home, my friend. I'll return your daughter to you whole" (114).

Jesse Bell

Jesse Bell has been given Eve's card while in a women's house of detention and arrives at Eve's after being fed up with her heroin addiction. As Jesse tells Bailey how she came to be at Eve's, it becomes clear that she possesses all the defiance of the Old Testament Jezebel coupled with the complex problems of modern life. Jezebel, a foreigner to her husband's country, continues her worship to Baal instead of the Jehovah of her husband's country and stands against Jehu who threatens and ultimately murders her son and husband – two bold postures which award Jezebel her legendary reputation as an evil woman. In the standoff with Jehu, Jezebel is also eventually killed so that Jehu can claim the kingship of Israel. Naylor's Uncle Eli King is reminiscent of Elijah/Jehu. The biblical Elijah had the power to anoint kings and prophets (I Kings 19). Uncle Eli anoints his nephew and great nephew to be the next generation of leaders. Naylor's Jesse Bell, a woman from the docks, marries into the prominent King family of Sugar Hill.

Uncle Eli, her husband's uncle, serves as her Jehu who she says, "kept at it until he killed me" (118). She further indicts him: "He was a murderer – a cold-blooded murderer. A murderer is somebody who plots to take somebody's life, ain't they? Well, he took my husband and son. And they were all I lived for" (118).

Jesse Bell's story then explains how exactly Uncle Eli takes Jesse's life through her husband and son so that he may serve as the leader of the King family. Uncle Eli exhausts his energy in attempting to please the patriarchal structure imposed by White America. Jesse Bell recounts his ravings and her criticism of him, "White folks are looking at us. White folks are judging us. They were Uncle Eli's god. And it was a god I wasn't buying" (125). Amy Benson Brown comments:

> Naylor transforms the power of the biblical King Ahab into the political dabbling of a socially prominent African American family, the 'Kings.' Like the Queen from Sidon, Jesse is a foreigner to the Kings' world; the crux of her difference here, however, is not ethnicity or nationality, but class. Naylor reconfigures Jezebel's sabotage of Israelie politics as Jesse Bell's resistance to the self-loathing social politics of the Kings. Like the biblical queen's persistent loyalty to the Canaanite gods of her people, Jesse maintains the integrity of her social roots and refuses to adopt what she calls the Kings's 'religion' [. . .] (29).

So, in the sense that Jesse Bell refused to worship Uncle Eli's "god," she can be more closely connected with Jezebel who rejected the God of Israel in favor of her own god, Baal. In fact, Jezebel's husband, King Ahab, also begins to worship Baal. He even sets up altars and temples in honor of the god. While Jesse Bell's husband does not join her in her "Baal," he does learn to eat the soul food to which he is unaccustomed, participate in Jesse Bell's parties, and accommodate her lesbian relationship. According to Jesse Bell, "from the very beginning he understood her," the lesbian lover (123). He even

maintains a protective scrim until Jesse and her relationship become anathema under exogenous pressure for his response after the public revelation of the relationship.

Jesse Bell places great emphasis on names. She recants Uncle Eli's vendetta against her:

> Still not satisfied, he took away my good name [. . .]. Got it so when they mention my name up on Sugar Hill, noses flare out like they smelling something decayed. Oh, yeah, Jesse Bell. The tramp from the docks. That slut who married into the King family. Child, didn't you read about what happened? She went straight to the dogs. I carried a good name. And I was a good wife. I mean, a good wife. But I didn't have no friends putting out the *Herald Tribune*. And it's all about who's in charge of keeping the records, ain't it? (118)

She proceeds:

> [. . .] Uncle Eli used every bit of influence he had to make sure my name hit the newspapers and stayed in the papers, throwing dirt on everything about my life, just digging, digging, until they dug up my special friend and my husband had to say, had to say he didn't know, cause, after all, he was a man and a King and there was his son to consider, so I'm out there by myself, on display like a painted dummy in a window as the name Jesse Bell came to mean that no-good slut from the docks and the nineteen years I'd put into my marriage didn't amount to dog shit; [. . .] (131).

Jesse was not so much concerned about losing the King name as she was the defaming of the Bell name. In fact, she criticizes the other wives on Sugar Hill who find their value in their husband's names: "Women up there look at other women as nothing unless they're attached to some man's name" (121). In this, she is far different from Willa Nedeed who needed the attachment of the Nedeed name to bring worth to her life.

## Mariam

In Mariam's chapter, scripture and religious ceremony are woven throughout to demonstrate a progression from Old Testament regiment to New Testament freedom. With Mariam, Naylor bridges biblical history. Mariam belongs to a village of Falasha

Jews, a group that had only the Pentateuch when they arrived in Ethiopia (Safran 27). However, she is also a young pregnant virgin. Without subsequent religious documents that reveal the virgin birth of Christ, the village inhabitants demand to know the identity of the father of Mariam's unborn child since there is no precedence for such a case. After Mariam's arrival at Eve's, Nadine and Eve discuss the special circumstance:

> Nadine: So you're telling me, we've got ourselves a miracle?
> Eve: Well, Nadine, it won't be the first.
> Nadine: Yeah, if we're talking the little girl in Galilee [. . .]
> Eve: She wasn't the first either.
> Nadine: But you've gotta admit, she's gotten away with it longer.
> Eve: And I say, more power to her. (153)

The quote suggests skepticism of Mary's virginity. Nonetheless, Mariam is not the little girl from Galilee and therefore must bear the ostracism of her people.

Still with no confession from Mariam revealing the identity of the father, the "eve of Atonement" arrives in her village when "the whole village would have to join [. . .] in her forgiveness" (155). On the eve of Atonement, Mariam's mother begins to envy the right that her son and husband enjoy in being able to pray in the courtyard near the Holy of Holies, the sacred place in the temple containing the Ark.

Pondering the necessity for the village to forgive Mariam, the mother thinks, "But is this not the night for *God* to forgive?" (155). She, then, demands direct access to God by finding "the courage to enter the sanctuary" (155). Before entering the sanctuary, she asks God for forgiveness for her false pride, but the narrator adds: "She was not going in there to bargain with God, to plead her goodness. She was going to demand pure and simple justice" (156).

Mariam's mother enters the sanctuary in prayer, acknowledging the patriarchs of Jewish tradition: "Mistreat me not, but remember the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob, Thy servants" (156). However, she quickly lays claim to God as one who honors the prayers of women as well, "But I am also His servant [. . .]. I am also His servant and He is my God too" (156). She continues her trek to the inner threshold: "That inner threshold is the point of no return. The backs of her legs hit the sharp edges of the sacrificial alter and she loses her balance. Her hand knocks over a clay vessel for catching blood. It shatters as it hits the ground" (157). Naylor's allusion to Christ's spilled blood on the cross in this passage calls for an accessibility to God for women.

Naylor's allusion to the tearing of the veil relays a dual message. Not only does the scene refer to Mark 15:38 when the veil of the Holy of Holies was torn in two upon the death of Jesus and "access to God was made available to all who come through Him" (Ryrie 122). The scene also presumes Toni Morrison's comments in "The Site of Memory." Morrison asserts that her job as a writer is to rip that veil drawn over "proceedings too terrible to relate" ("The Site of Memory" 91). She continues: "The exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, [. . .]" (91). Mariam's inability to speak in defense of her mother or even in defense of herself represents womankind as a whole who has not been able to, as Toni Morrison puts it, "participate in the discourse even when we were its topic" ("The Site of Memory" 91).

## Miss Maple

With universal divine access established in Bailey's Café, Naylor progresses toward an androgynous ideal as the final achievement of humanity's healing. According to Mary Daly, "The healing process demands a reaching out toward completeness of human being in the members of both sexes – that is movement toward androgynous

being" (50). With access to God finally in place, Naylor concludes her characters with one major character, Miss Maple, and one minor one, his father, who realize the equilibrium of male and female.

Miss Maple is Eve's housekeeper who has a Ph.D. in statistics and whose birth name is Stanley Beckwourth Booker T. Washington Carver. His story surveys his journey toward his own definition of manhood that includes an assessment of his father's. Miss Maple says of him that, "in another time and place, my father would have been a philosopher or perhaps a poet. His brothers just thought him spoiled and lazy" (170). Then there are most other men in Miss Maple's life. The men in his mother's family criticize his father because "he wouldn't help lynch the itinerant drifter who raped [Miss Maple's mother] and left her to die in a ravine" (171). For his resistance to violence, Miss Maple's father is called "*butter britches*" by his own brothers. Although he is rebuked in town by whites who vandalize his expensive car and spit on his shoes, he refuses to counter with similar tactics. Miss Maple remembers his own feelings regarding his father:

> Philosophy hadn't saved my father from the contempt we met in town. Philosophy didn't give him guts. I hated being ashamed of my father and when I finally told him so, there were tears in his eyes. And I was ashamed of him for that. (171)

While the father's more feminine aspect is hinted at throughout the chapter, the father's comfort level with that aspect of himself becomes clear when he and his son are placed in a storage closet by poor whites. After father and son are thrown in the closet without their clothes and confronted with the option of facing the whites naked or in the women's garments that they find in a trunk, the father does not hesitate to put on a dress. Realizing that their male-ness will be the first to be attacked, the father sees that

acknowledgment of the female component is their only recourse. Miss Maple recalls: "My father took the dress and forced me to take the corset: Don't be foolish; things might turn ugly out there, and you can see that they're the type who go straight for the balls" (184). Then, in his soliloquy to one of the poor whites who oppresses him, the father smashes his bare heel down on the man's Adam's apple saying:

> I am a man of peace. I am a sensitive man. I can spend hours with Proust and have been known to weep at a sunset. Those are the qualities I wanted to pass on to my son. I believe he has the capacity to be a great leader. And I've tried to teach him that a man rules best when he rules with compassion. (185)

The action of his stepping on the Adam's apple represents the repression of the overwhelming male domination to make room for his exposure of female principles.

Although his father's cognizance of his own male and female qualities is apparent to Miss Maple, Miss Maple does not allow his female self to become a permanent factor in his life until he realizes that his manhood is of no account in terms of his attempt of job acquisition. Girded with innovative marketing strategies and a Ph.D. in statistics, he is unable to obtain a job because of his race. Finally, bothered by the heat that becomes unbearable in his gray flannel suit, Miss Maple decides, "The only business clothes that could keep me going through that summer were ones designed for the American female" (201). Bailey's final comments on Miss Maple display how resolved Miss Maple is to both aspects of himself:

> Miss Maple goes back to regular pants and a jacket in the winter. But he's taken to wearing a wool cape instead of an overcoat. He says he likes the swirl and freedom of it, and it keeps him just as warm. No doubt about it, the man has flair – and courage. And looking at the way he can wear any piece of cloth on his own terms gets you to thinking that maybe [. . .] just maybe. (213)

Charles Long's comments in Cain Hope Felder's Troubling Biblical Waters suggest how White American patriarchal influences have shaped Miss Maple:

> During the period of Western modernity the conquest and exploitation of the world by the West created a geographical context in which the white races formed the centers from which the exploitation and exercise of the hegemonous power took place. These centers defined the structures of authentic human existence. The distances from these centers were adjudicated by varying degrees of humanity, so that at the outermost periphery, where color or blackness coincided with distance, the centrist held that these were lesser human being. (qtd. In Felder 104)

Thus, at the "outermost periphery" alternative concepts of being are created to countermand the control of the centrist, and in creating such alternatives Naylor leans upon religious symbols. She goes out of the "system" in Bailey's Café while using one document that the patriarchal system has used to support it, the Bible.

Bailey's Café culminates in the spirit of community unity. Upon the birth of Mariam's son, everyone joins in singing a spiritual:

> Anybody ask you who you are?
> Who you are?
> Who you are?
> Anybody ask you who you are?
> Tell him – you're the child of God? (225)

Then Gabriel, a Russian Jew who owns a pawnshop down the street from the café, collaborates with Bailey and Miss Maple to circumcise the child, a practice dating back to Deuteronomy. While the reader anticipates a happy ending, Bailey is quick to negate any thoughts along this vein:

> [. . .] there's nothing I'd like better than to give you a happy ending to what happened today.
> [. . .] Yeah, I'd almost cut off my right arm to be able to say something like that. But after Eve tried to return the baby to Mariam, she was met with a wall of water. In Eve's absence Mariam had tried to create a running stream to bathe in. And the void out back produced exactly what her childlike mind called up: endless water (228)

Three possibilities exist for Mariam's ultimate fate. Following Catholic belief that the virgin Mary is "taken up body and soul into heavenly glory upon completion of her earthly sojourn," Mariam could have ascended to heaven (Daly 52). Also, the Beta Israel, Falasha Jews, are said to 'smell like water' because of their "endless purification rituals" (Safran 5). Perhaps the water is symbolic of Mariam's return to her village in Ethiopia. The third option is most likely her fate. Since the void in the back of Bailey's Café is a place of suicide, the most likely occurrence is that Mariam dies in the "endless water". We find in Mama Day that the latter end was the correct one. If the ending of the novel were told in a more optimistic tone, either of the first two choices might be acceptable. Nevertheless, merit is strong enough in the first two options to suggest influence in Naylor's construction of Mariam's end.

Galatians 3:28 is an appropriate correlative to Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Café: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (KJV). Carolyn Osiek provides several interpretations of Galatians 3:28, and among them two are appropriate for the reader's interpretation of Bailey's Café: 1) The scripture "endorses an end to sexism and discrimination of every kind"; and 2) The scripture is a suggestion that in God's future "the tension between human opposites – Jew and Gentile, slave or free, male and female – will disappear" (335). In Gabriel and Bailey is the compromising of Jew and Gentile. In Miss Maple, the reader sees the end of the power of gender oppression and racism. The negatives still exist at the novel's end, but Miss Maple rises above them. He gives in to the gender pull within him to create a balance. He utilizes his education and skill to defeat the power of racism. This enables him to be free instead of the slave he would

have been had he obtained the position at his last interview. Bailey observes Miss Maple in saying: "Slave labor is never as productive as the work of a free man – even if he's working for free. And Eve has allowed Miss Maple to be one of the freest men I know" (216).

While universal tolerance is one of the resulting themes of Bailey's Café, gender equality is a suggested vehicle to achieve it. In this novel, Naylor raises the female from behind the dust in the case of Eve and to the exterior in Miss Maple's case. Although Esther stays in the cellar, she makes a notable move in going to Eve's. Bailey says that "All these people are in transition," and Cornel West adds "If we are serious about acknowledging and affirming other people's humanity, then we are committed to trusting and believing that they are forever in process" (12). No better illustration of this is Jesse Bell's torturous trek toward conquering her drug addiction. Because patriarchal society does not recognize that people are "forever in process," there are Eve's brownstone and Bailey's Café. Eve and Bailey first acknowledge their own problems with life and detail how they were able to develop to functional levels, but they are in continuous process. Bailey is reminded by Gabe in the final chapter, "you still stand on that wharf in San Francisco, America" (219). Also, Eve's role expands throughout the novel. She is first a young girl exiled from her home, but she rises to obtain a degree of wealth that allows her to buy the brownstone. Then she becomes a mother figure in caring for the people who come to her place for sanctuary. Finally, she performs the role of midwife. Midwifery is Eve's last role accounted in Bailey's Café; however, her development is surely not complete.

Like African American writers before her, Gloria Naylor in Bailey's Café encounters her characters where they are, on life's edge, and tries to bring them to their own center. Throughout the novel, she offers several images of centeredness. The lilies of the valley in the center of Eve's yard offer one of the first. In Mariam's chapter, Mariam's mother moves toward the center of the Holy of Holies. These images, in their religiosity, display the divine nature of humanity. Naylor communicates that, in the center of every human, is a divine wholeness. Gloria Naylor seems to hope as Mary Daly does that "women are breaking through to awareness of sexual caste as a universal phenomenon" (133). Daly continues, "As women revolt against this a new sense of reality is emerging. That is a counterworld to patriarchy is coming into being which is by the same token counter to religion as patriarchal" (133). Naylor's "counterworld to patriarchy" has arrived. Although it levitates in mythical space, it gives the readers who "are serious about acknowledging and affirming other people's humanity" ideas about how to make wholeness a reality.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

African, Negro, Colored, Black, Afro-American, African American are all names that chronicle the centuries-old debate about what to call American descendants of Africans. Historiographers of some future time might wonder if the people called African Americans were the same as those called Black. Were Blacks the same as Colored people and Negroes? If indeed, these scholars of history find these groups to be one in the same, they still might ponder why such multiple names were necessary to describe one group of people. If the historian is curious and diligent enough, she or he will follow the query all the way back to the continent of Africa where tradition dictates a special value in the naming process, its inherent prophecy, and the distinct description that names bespeak. Such an ardent scholar will find that these people who began in Africa and who were forcefully removed to America took with them the belief that names should carry in them honor, a sense of family lineage, and the essence of an individual. The multiple name changes chosen by these American descendants of Africans indicate the multiple attempts of this disenfranchised people to get it right in order to name their new identity as people living in the foreign land of America. Also though, the African naming process recognizes that one may go through several name changes in a lifetime. Furthermore, each name change has mirrored the level of cultural awareness of these descendants of Africans living in America. Each name carries with it more information

than the previous one about who these people actually are.

Some leaders of the 1800s insisted on being called "Negro" and never "Colored." Others claimed to be Colored. Any other group identification would have been insulting. Quite a different case, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (my own denomination) of the 1800s became the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the twentieth century, pulling itself from the race name debate. "Black" gained and maintained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s until a "better" name came in the 1980s in "Afro American" which quickly became "African American" in the midst of a still strong affinity for just being Black. Thus, government and educational forms have a box in the section designated for ethnic groups that reads "African American/Black."

This barrage of names offered to describe one segment of the American population has yielded criticism that Black folks or whatever and whoever we are this year are simply confused about who we are. I must admit that the evidence suggests that those critics are absolutely correct. Even today, there is no consensus on the matter. For example, three respected and very familiar initials in our community represent three names that describe the same group of people - NAACP (National Association of *Colored* People), UNCF (United *Negro* College Fund), HBCU ( Historically *Black* Colleges and Universities). However confusing, each name change indicates that descendants of Africans now living in America intimately comprehend that naming is paramount to self-definition. That is undoubtedly a legacy from Africa itself.

The practice of naming individual Blacks has faired somewhat better than attempts to name our entire group but not without some surreptitious maneuvering. In a pre-Emancipation America, Whites disregarded Africans' indigenous names and gave

them new ones that were much easier for Americans to pronounce. Although the slaves' quarters held a place of solace and familiarity for the Africans to call each other by their original names, the record books would, in most cases, dismiss the African names in lieu of the names given by the slave masters. So for generations of slaves, the written record erased their actual being since traditional West African societies considered names determinants of self. In many cases, as in Africa, the names bespoke birth days, birth conditions, and personalities that reincarnated honored ancestors. Without the information carried in those relics, current historiographers are at a considerable disadvantage. However, since the names also constitute part of oral history, the value of some of the names has come to us orally.

Conversely though, in those cases in which slaves were not defiant enough to have their own names beyond those prescribed by slave masters, much damage was done to those because their identities were, in fact, determined by those outside of a nurturing community. These names were void of any communal input. Vestiges of those acts of misnaming have remained. I am reminded of the story behind my own grandfather's name. As he tells the story, he was named J.W. by his parents. When he enlisted in the armed services, the particular branch did not believe that his name was J.W., so he was dubbed with the name of John William. I cannot identify the direct effect that my grandfather's misnaming had on our family, but I cannot help but conjecture that much of the disjointed nature of my patrilineal clan is due to such sacrifices of self-identity. The nine children that were produced by my grandparents are all vastly different, all showing a strange semblance of bonding if any at all. Today, my grandfather goes by J.W., but he

still recalls the misnaming incident with the same joy in which he recalls most stories of his youth.

Naylor's trilogy stirs my thinking on the matter of misnaming and its direct relevance to all Black folks living in America. When Naylor's characters are not named correctly or if they do not embrace their given names, they suffer identity crises and slowly implode under the heavy weight of self-denial. The effect in Linden Hills is erasure. The result in Mama Day is physical death. In Bailey's Café, Naylor does not exactly stress the intratextual relationships of names; however, the names serve more as a message to the reader that women have been subjugated far too long. The question still remains - How is this naming business relevant to us today?

Naylor even answers this question for the reader. She concludes in her novels that naming is a communal process if done correctly. No one in her novels has a distinctly African name, but the characters have names that come from the hearts of loved ones whether their parents or their entire communities. Except for a brief reference to an islander who named his daughter Keisha, there is no mention of African or pseudo-African names, which were especially popular in the 1970s. In fact, Naylor's handling of names suggests that reclamation of African names themselves is not mandatory; nonetheless, it is the maintenance of the African process of naming that is necessary in the mediation between Africa and the Western world. For Naylor, names must have spiritual and communal relevance. Again, here I am reminded of my own family. For years, my father's family has fumbled over my name and the name of my sister Sheri. I distinctly recall a Christmas gathering at which a cousin said that our names were too close together, in essence too akin in pronunciation. That is just the point. I am always

proud to say that our names match. Our mother designed them to do so. So not only are we sisters in the biological, literal sense, but our names are sisters as well, both emanating from love (their literal definition in French). Furthermore, I was to marry a man who was also named carefully and accurately. His name is Ermanno (Brotherhood) Allon (like a mighty oak). The prophecy of his parents in his name has come to be true. He is a brother to everyone and as spiritually strong as any man I have ever known.

Naylor's three novels discussed here relay the message that we must find ways to retain the names, the conduits of our history and determinants of our identities. In my case, I have created a song that recalls my matrilineal line. The first stanza is below:

me mommie name
name Gracie
her mommie name
name Daisy
her mommie name
name Annie
her mommie name
name Fannie

Naylor uses novel-length commentary to record names, for the novels discussed in this thesis are really a commentary about the precious, spiritual nature of names. We must also share the stories of our names and those whom we name.

For all the discussion about the importance of African naming principles, I cannot forget the two other prevalent naming elements in Naylor's novels - feminism and spirtuality/theology. It is Naylor's intimacy with African naming practices and their translations in the African American community that influences her application of the practices to her feminist and theological ideologies. She skillfully merges all three areas - Afrocentrism, Feminism, Theology - in her name construction so that her texts attempt

to liberate women from patriarchal systems including those hiding behind the guise of Judeo-Christianity. Also, she relates the three areas by postulating through the naming patterns that denial of any one of the areas results in denial of all three. The characters who deny their naming power as women also seem to obliterate themselves racially as well. Similarly, the female characters who deny their value in the context of Judeo-Christianity also deny their identities as powerful Black women. The point is that name/self denial on any level results as name/self denial on every level.

Gloria Naylor's extensive commentary on names comes after other African American writers who have made light of the African American tradition. Zora Neale Hurston's Tea Cake, by his very name, told readers that he would add sweetness to Janie's later years after two bitter marriages. Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas is one of the most memorable characters in African American literature. In Wright's castigation of America's systemic oppression of Black men, he manages to manipulate the name of his main character to demonstrate the myth of the big evil Black man who comes to prey on White women. Toni Morrison is the most outstanding African American writer in recent times to use the African American naming tradition to her advantage. As Naylor does, Morrison uses a mix of biblical allusion and African American tradition to name her characters. Names like Beloved, Pilate, and Corinthians take her readers from the pages of her novels to include biblical texts and images in the comprehension of the novels. Additionally, the song of Solomon in the novel of the same title is actually a song that takes the protagonist back to his African history.

That naming has been important in the African American community is not groundbreaking news; neither is its prevalence in African American literature.

Nonetheless, Gloria Naylor reminds readers of such importance and emphasizes that, in terms of naming, priority must be maintained in the African American community so that we may look to a "silver mirror God" in lieu of exterior ones. Especially in Mama Day, Naylor's most positive and culturally connected novelistic reflection of naming, the author ensures a cultural continuity that should be the mainstay of a community in order for it to thrive. When the community is not allowed to name its members, the members literally die. So, ultimately, the importance of exploring the naming tradition is to find ways to reclaim our heritage and to restore us back to ourselves.

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